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Young Mothers
On The Margins:
the meanings and experiences
of early motherhood
in and out of care

by

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Abstract

This research study explores young women's accounts of becoming mothers below the age of 21 and in adverse circumstances. The findings are based on five group interviews and twenty-eight individual interviews. All participants were living in areas of social deprivation, and just over two-thirds had been in care.

The meanings the young women give to motherhood are used in negotiating their social worlds. The key dimensions of these processes of negotiation are: the validation of heterosexual femininity and of a 'caring' identity; and negotiation of their class position, including their position in relation to the labour market, the education system and the care system. Motherhood also gives them agency and control when patriarchy, capitalism and surveillance constrain their opportunities to actively shape their lives in other ways.

The young women's own discourses of motherhood and mothering allow them to resist hegemonic discourses of teenage mothers as irresponsible, promiscuous and as seeking economical dependency. Much of their own discourse of motherhood is positive, and they often employ a discourse in which they have reformed and 'grown up' through motherhood. They argue that it is responsibility, rather than age, which is the key determinant of adequate mothering. However, these positive meanings are in tension with the difficulties and losses. All the young women found that their lives are constrained in some way by motherhood and that, ideally, they would have postponed motherhood until they were more settled.

The young women assert that there is a mismatch between their own views and professional responses. It is argued that a shift is required, in the framing of policy and practice, away from viewing vulnerable young people in terms of 'risk assessment', towards an approach based on their strength and resilience, and on a recognition that, given support, young women can be good enough mothers.

Transcription notation

Notation used follows a simplified version of the Sacks-Schlegoff-Jefferson system as used in conversation analysis (Linde 1993: xi-xiv; Atkinson and Heritage 1999).

- 1) Utterances starting simultaneously are linked with single left-hand square brackets.
- 2) Overlapping utterances which do not start simultaneously are indicated by a left-hand bracket at the point where they begin to overlap.

C	'Yeah, that's what slags do for fucking money nowadays'. That's the exact..
A	[She said what?

- 3) A short overlapping utterance is enclosed within the main utterance, enclosed by slashes.

I really hate that //A: Yeah// I think, you know, people
do look down, down their nose at me

- 4) Where one utterance follows immediately on from the previous one, without any apparent gap, this is indicated by equals signs at the end of the one utterance and the start of the next.

A She shouldn't have dragged you away? =

D = No. (p) And then we seen this woman again

5) Where there are pauses between or within utterances, these are indicated by one of the following: short pauses (less than two seconds) within a sentence are indicated by a dash.

So I like, thought, you know - I started crying in the middle of Co-op.

Short pauses (less than 2 seconds between sentences or between utterances are indicated by a small (p) in brackets.

No. (p) And then we seen this woman again.

Longer pauses (more than 2 seconds) are indicated by a capital (P) in brackets.

Um, (P) I don't know really.

6) Emphasis on a particular word or syllable is indicated by underlining.

I feel I'm constantly like, being judged and stereotyped.

7) Colons are used to indicate a lengthening of the sound of a syllable.

We used to get a loa:d of respect when we was at school

8) A question mark indicates a rising inflection, not necessarily a question.

I think, you know, people do look down, down their nose at me?

9) Where part of an utterance is spoken at a faster pace than the surrounding speech, this is indicated by 'more than' and 'less than' signs.

>I wasn't sure how to answer her<

10) Where part of an utterance is spoken louder than the surrounding speech, this is indicated by capitalization.

Stereo, I'D JUST SAY THE STEREOTYPE to say

11) Where there is doubt over what the speaker has said, these words are placed in brackets. Where the words of an utterance cannot be heard, this is marked (unclear).

That's what social (unclear) but it's not.

12) Square brackets are used to enclose other information added by the transcriber

You can't win [laughs].

13) Removal of a short piece of text (such as a phrase) is indicated by a series of dots (...). Where one or more lines are removed this is indicated by dots on several lines

11 Children's Home, that I'm full of problems, //A: No// I will give problems'

.
.
.

23 A Yeah, so people - kind of - get a picture of you.

The Participants

N.B. All names given in these tables and this thesis are pseudonyms. Real names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Table 1: Group interview participants

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Amanda*	Carol	Anna	Beverley	Christine
Louisa	Charlene*	Jan	Juliet*	Kirsty
Marie	Denise	Jayshree	Justine	Monica*
Nicola	Julie*	Sam	Kathy	Naseem
Rachel	Trish		Katie	Nazia
Ruth			Linda	
			Moir	

Table 2: Individual interview participants

Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6
Louisa	Carol	Anna	Beverley	Christine	Ebele**
Marie	Denise	Jan	Justine	Kirsty	Karen**
Nicola	Emma**	Jayshree	Kathy	Naseem	Sonia**
Rachel	Julie	Sam	Katie	Nazia	Yvonne**
Ruth	Trish		Linda		
			Moir & Gavin		
			Natasha & Robert**		

* Took part in group interview only

** Took part in individual interview only

Introduction

This thesis explores young women's accounts of becoming mothers in adverse social circumstances. The participants each had a personal story to tell, and their accounts are situated within a set of historically specific social conditions. The stories are all of young women¹, but they had certain characteristics in common besides gender. They were not a representative sample of young mothers, but were mostly users of projects run by the national children's charity, NCH², which works with and for vulnerable children, young people and families. All were young - in their teens or early twenties. All were mothers. All were living on a low income, being economically 'dependent' (on state benefits, parents or partners). All were, or had been, in adverse circumstances, and were on the margins of society in a multiplicity of ways: economically, culturally, in terms of age, motherhood and family life. Just over two-thirds had been in care, and only one was living with both birth parents.

They were also facing social disadvantage on a number of levels. All were living in neighbourhoods characterised by social deprivation, some amongst the most deprived in England (Neighbourhood Statistics Service 2001). This clearly impacted upon their opportunities for educational attainment and increased the likelihood that they would experience poverty, unemployment, crime and inadequate housing. This was not true just of the care leavers but of all of the young women in this study.

Young mothers who have been in care face specific challenges, due both to

¹ Two young men were also present during interviews, one taking an active part.

² Formerly called NCH Action for Children and National Children's Homes.

personal circumstances and inadequacies in service provision. Compared to other young people, care leavers tend to receive less support from their birth family, to have had more disrupted childhood years, and to move to independence at a younger age. The emotional legacy of childhood trauma and in some cases abuse, along with growing up in a variety of placements, is likely to leave scars. This may lead care leavers to require support, not just in early adulthood, but at various points in their lives (Willis 1993; Care Leavers Association [CLA] 2001). There is also a legacy of being in care both in material terms and in terms of popular and professional conceptualisations of care leavers. For example, they may have to contend with being viewed as either criminally active or psychologically damaged (CLA 2001), and with the consequences of being constructed in these ways.

Gender, diversity and difference

Research into the experiences of young mothers who are care leavers is extremely limited. Furthermore, the approach adopted here differs from that of previous studies (cf. Biehal et al 1992, 1995; Corlyon and McGuire 1999) which take policy as their primary focus. These are useful in their own right, but there is a distinct dearth of studies that theorise the issue using wider critical debates about the socio-cultural context of youth and motherhood. This thesis adopts a feminist and youth-centred approach, and places the young women's accounts in the context of social forces and relationships, notably of gender, class and ethnicity.

The main focus here is upon young mothers (rather than young parents), for several reasons. Firstly, young men were not excluded from the study but most of the babies' fathers were absent from the women's lives. Secondly, sexuality,

mothering and caring form a 'fundamental and near universal discourse in terms of which girls are constituted and in large part constitute themselves' (Cain 1989: 4). Thus, it is necessary to work through this discourse, whilst being reflexive about doing so. This is important in both analysing policy implications and in exploring possible alternative life courses for girls and young women. Thirdly, the lives of young women are a valid source of study in their own right and it is unnecessary and unhelpful to define women as 'the other' in relation to men.

Whilst gender is central to the analysis, it is important to recognise the many other complex and overlapping aspects of subordination, particularly of class, ethnicity and generation. The dynamics of young women's lives should be considered in the context of 'a racially-structured capitalist patriarchy' (Griffin 1993b: 159), although the implications of this for identity cannot be 'read off' in any direct way. As Cohen notes in relation to class and identity,

Class positions are rarely registered in a simple unmediated form... they are lived through a series of non-class positions which they invisibly connect and inflect at the level of cultural reproduction (1997: 227).

In presenting their accounts, and discussing their material and discursive circumstances, young women should not be seen as passive victims of circumstances or natural carers and nurturers. They are neither simply actively resisting oppressive forces (Griffin 1993b) nor rebelling against patriarchy and class. Instead, this thesis provides a more ambivalent account of young women as active in constructing lives, families and futures whilst, at the same time, constrained by motherhood in circumstances of social (and often personal) adversity, youth and patriarchy.

Dilemmas in researching early motherhood

The topic of early motherhood is not an easy one for feminists or anyone concerned with the needs of marginalised young people. Whilst young women themselves may see motherhood as a positive choice, it may appear to others to impose limitations and restrict opportunities. It can also raise difficult dilemmas and anxieties over the sometimes conflicting needs of children and of their parents. This may be one reason why young mothers' own accounts are infrequently sought. However, the relative absence of critical voices in such debates allows the dominance of conservative discourses. Even from a pragmatic viewpoint, it is important to include the perspectives of young mothers, without which policy and practice initiatives are likely to flounder.

This thesis attempts to describe the complexities of the meanings of motherhood for young women. Motherhood has considerable rewards for them but is hard work and involves sacrifices. Because of dominant psychological discourses of motherhood and mothering, it can be difficult for women to discuss the difficult aspects of mothering or feelings of ambivalence (Parker 1995; Woollett and Marshall 2000), as to do so is to invite moral approbation (Miller 2000). This can also prevent them from requesting help and support.

These difficulties are massively amplified in the case of women who lie beyond the discursive boundaries of 'normal motherhood', amongst whom asking for help is likely to have more drastic consequences. Moral sanctions, which form a key form of 'policing' of mothers (Miller 2000), are less feared by such women than disqualification from mothering through the removal of a child into care.

This makes the presentation of the stories of young mothers particularly sensitive, as there is a danger of interpreting ambivalent accounts as being peculiar to young mothers, rather than being a feature of many women's accounts of becoming mothers. Thus, there is a risk that their narratives may add to their pathologisation. Rather than being viewed as in need of support, such young mothers may be viewed as at best inadequate and at worst dangerous.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider the negative and ambivalent feelings expressed by young mothers. To do otherwise would risk romanticisation of their lives and, like everyone else, the young women in this study are neither angels nor demons. They are young people getting by and struggling to get on in adverse circumstances. Therefore, they face problems of a type and magnitude that most other people do not have to negotiate, and deal with these in a variety of ways.

Defining discourse

This thesis includes analysis of discourse in interviews with young mothers (particularly in Chapters Six and Seven) and also briefly in policy and the media (mainly in Chapter Two). The term 'discourse' is used here to refer to the ways in which language constructs meaning, both in the young women's accounts and in wider cultural discourses of teenage motherhood and youth. Thus, the approach taken is concerned with three domains of analysis: culture and social relations, social interaction, and the self and sense making (Wetherell et al. 2001).

My concern with cultural and social relations is informed by critical discourse analysis, which views the discourse analyst as 'social critic rather than neutral

observer' (Wetherell et al. 2001: 384). It is also informed by the position of Foucauldian discourse analysts that wider discursive practices and modes of representation cannot be treated as external to conversation. Individuals do not reinvent ways of talking with every new conversation but use existing resources in talk, and this has implications for meaning. As Burman and Parker note:

These resources are repertoires, repertoires we do not create anew when we speak, but which we have to borrow and refashion for our own purposes. A problem is that when we borrow a repertoire it always carries with it more than we [could] think. (1993: 4)

The subject positions that people can take up are constrained, because discursive positions exist prior to the individual (Hollway 1989; Henriques et al. 1998). Exploring such repertoires can give an indication of the ways in which subjects are positioned in discourse, and of the consequences of this for identity and action.

However, I do not employ a pure Foucauldian version of discourse analysis, because of its implications for agency and meaning making, and because of the need to acknowledge the social interaction in which interview conversation is produced. Research participants do not passively employ pre-existing discursive resources. Instead, they use a variety of strategies in order to take up particular subject positions and to resist others. My approach therefore combines a concern with discourse resources (from Foucauldian discourse analysis) but also with discursive practices, or how people construct meaning in conversation (from discursive psychology). This kind of synthesis has been advocated by Potter and Wetherell (1995; Wetherell 1998) and Harper (1999) and holds that people are active meaning-makers. They are spoken by discourses but also speak them.

It is also important to consider how meaning is situated in the interactional context – that is, the ways in which interviews are jointly constructed. This context can only be dispensed with if the researcher holds the position that people have fixed accounts of their lives. Such a position is not adopted here, as the problem of how to take account of the interviewer's role, 'is not solved by making the interviewer invisible and inaudible' (Mishler 1986: 83). A contextualised analysis takes into account how meaning is constructed actively and collaboratively in interaction with the interviewer (Mishler 1986; Riessman 1993; Kvale 1996; Miller and Glassner 1997). Interviews can thus be seen as 'speech events' (Mishler 1986), or as a particular form of interaction or conversation (Kvale 1996).

Discourse analysts also have varying positions on the relationship between discourse and other social practices. The position taken here is in line with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992; Van Dijk 1993; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999) in which it is argued that the construction of meaning in conversation is related to other social practices. It is also influenced by the British cultural studies tradition (Hall and Jefferson 1975; Willis 1977; Griffin 1985), in which 'theoretical, methodological and political concerns are worked through empirical understandings' (Skeggs 1997: 1), as well as by more recent work that draws on this cultural studies tradition whilst incorporating a post-structuralist influence (see, for example, Griffin 1993a, 1997; Hebdige 1988). Within this approach, it is argued that recognition of the importance of the symbolic and of representation should not lead to a negation of the role of social structures.

This is important for research that aims to have implications for social change. This aspect of research has sometimes been neglected by discourse analysts, yet consideration of the ways in which people give meaning to their experience can provide both a powerful social critique and a means of empowerment, through the identification and elucidation of counter-discourses (Willig 1999). These points relate to the need for a *social* theory of discourse, which both acknowledges the importance of representation and language, as well as of material practices, institutions, and power. For this reason, the approach adopted here is one which seeks to recognise that the ways in which young women talk about their lives are intrinsically linked to gender, class, ethnicity, care history and youth.

A related issue for discourse analysts is that of relativism. If a post-structuralist approach is adopted, it becomes highly problematic to posit a relationship between what is said in an interview and the existence of some kind of external reality. Research interviews with young mothers who are care leavers may touch on intensely private or traumatic experiences, the impact of which is only too real; for example, memories of abuse or neglect, of familial relationships, of sexual relationships, of entering and growing up in care. Whilst the life events these stories relate to are unknowable because we can have no direct access to them (Plummer 1995), the stories people choose to tell are embedded in life experiences. It is therefore important not to lose sight of the *content* of what is being said in interviews. As Rosenwald and Ochberg point out,

If a life is no more than a story and a story is governed only by the situation in which it is told, then one cannot declare a situation unliveable or a life damaged (1992: 269).

Treating stories and their meanings as relating to real events in real social contexts is an important aspect of taking abuse and subordination seriously, and also of intervening in the demonisation of young mothers in dominant discourse. It is also difficult to do otherwise than conceptualise the young women as embodied subjects, considering that the defining experience they describe is childbirth – an inescapably embodied experience. Like Hey (1997) I also want to retain a concept of emotions as embodied or material productions, as they play a defining role in the formation of subjectivity. For all these reasons, I adopt a position in which ‘discourse analysis needs to attend to the conditions which make the meanings of texts possible’ (Parker 1992: 28). Therefore, whilst much of the analysis is concerned with the meanings of experience, this is placed in context through the description of circumstances, events and relationships.

The thesis and key findings

The young women inhabit various discourses of mothering which make sense of their cultural worlds and of their lives, and being a young mother makes sense to them in ways that hegemonic discourses do not allow. The meanings of motherhood for them are complex, contradictory and heterogeneous. Nevertheless, they include particular sets of meanings used in negotiating their social worlds in key dimensions. The decisive aspects of these are: the validation of heterosexual femininity, of a ‘caring’ identity and of motherhood as part of this; resistance of patriarchal power through the meanings they give to lone motherhood; and negotiation of their class position, including their position in relation to the labour market, the education system and the care system. These dimensions are further complexified by dynamics of ethnicity and racism.

It can therefore be argued that motherhood and the stories that young women have in relation to it constitute a 'reproduction code' (Cohen 1997: 227). That is, a cultural code that provides a subject position and makes sense of discontinuities and contradictions, 'throwing a distinctive grid of periodisation and predicament over the life cycle' (op. cit.). This is particularly important given the need for the young women to negotiate multiple dimensions of oppression.

The meanings the young women give to motherhood and mothering are different in key dimensions from hegemonic discourses of 'teenage motherhood', and their own discourses allow them to both negotiate and resist hegemonic discourses. Academic discourses tend to paint a depressing and sometimes fatalistic picture, conceptualising early motherhood as a 'problem' leading to a downward spiral of seemingly intractable inter-generational problems (see SEU 1999). Popular discourses also articulate moral concerns over teenage sexuality and promiscuity, lone motherhood and the breakdown of the nuclear family, a so-called 'dependency culture' and irresponsibility amongst young people (Griffin 1993a; Luker 1996).

In contrast, much of the young women's discourse of motherhood and mothering is positive. Whilst they view mothering as challenging and as involving sacrifices, they employ a discourse in which age is not the key determinant of adequate mothering. The key factor for the young women is their ability to be responsible, which they largely view positively. Furthermore, motherhood is positive in allowing the young women to be active in their lives and to instigate change. It

gives them agency and control when patriarchy, capitalism and surveillance constrain their opportunities to actively shape their lives in other ways.

One of the complex and contradictory aspects of the young women's discourses and their experience lies in the ways in which the positive meanings of motherhood are in tension with the difficulties and losses. For some, these difficulties are much more prominent than for others, reflecting the diversity of accounts. Nevertheless, all the young women state that their lives are constrained in some way by motherhood and that, ideally, they would have postponed motherhood until they were more established and settled.

The young women's accounts have a number of implications for policy, and I argue that policy interventions should start from their experience of themselves as resourceful and resilient, and should address the fact that motherhood makes sense to them, rather than being an aberration. It is also important to recognise that young women can be good enough mothers. Policy and practice in relation to young mothers needs to acknowledge their own understandings, and work with, rather than against them. A key argument, therefore, is that there needs to be a shift away from an approach to vulnerable young people in terms of 'risk assessment', towards one based on their strength and resilience. The thesis also has wider policy implications, in that, if motherhood is connected to wider socio-cultural worlds, this suggests a need to address the structural conditions of youth, including youth unemployment and the disadvantages faced by care leavers.

Research questions

The following chapters seek to answer a number of questions. These reflect unanswered questions from previous research, the social circumstances of the young women, and the central argument of the thesis. The questions are:

- 1) What are the hegemonic discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood?
 - a) What are the mainstream academic discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood?
 - b) What are the hegemonic popular discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood, as represented in media discourses?
 - c) How do such discourses relate to wider discourses of youth and motherhood?
- 2) What are the meanings young women give to their experiences of motherhood?
 - a) What are the meanings they give to the experience of pregnancy, and how do these meanings change over the time of pregnancy?
 - b) What are the meanings they give to the experience of becoming a mother?
 - c) How do the meanings of motherhood relate to feminine identity?
 - d) How do the meanings of motherhood relate to class, including material circumstances, labour market position, educational experience and working-class identity?
 - e) How do the meanings of motherhood relate to the experience of having been in care?
 - f) How do the meanings of motherhood relate to ethnic identity?
 - g) How do the meanings of motherhood relate to young women's own experiences of being mothered / parented?
 - h) How do the meanings of motherhood relate to, or differ from, the meanings they give to fatherhood?

- 3) What are the interactions between hegemonic discourses of teenage motherhood and the young women's own discourses?
 - a) To what extent do young women's own accounts of motherhood enter into hegemonic discourses?
 - b) What impact, if any, do popular and academic discourses of 'teenage mothers' have on the young women?
 - c) Do the young women negotiate hegemonic discourses of 'teenage mothers' through the construction of their own accounts? If so, how do they do this?
 - d) How do the young women's accounts both accord with and conflict with hegemonic discourses?
- 4) How successful are the young women's discursive strategies? What are the consequences of their discourses for themselves?
 - a) What, if anything, do the young women gain through the discourses they employ?
 - b) Are there any negative aspects of the discourses they employ for themselves?
- 5) What are the consequences for policy and practice in relation to,
 - a) pregnant young women
 - b) young mothers
 - c) young people
 - d) care leavers?

Conclusion

In attempting to address these questions, the thesis takes the following structure: Chapter One outlines the mainstream policy-oriented literature on teenage mothers and care leavers. Demographic evidence shows that the rate of teenage

pregnancy in Britain is higher than for neighbouring countries but has remained fairly steady over many years (Botting et al 1998). It also shows that care leavers and young women from socially deprived backgrounds have an increased likelihood of becoming young mothers (Garnett 1992; Biehal et al 1992, 1995). Much of the research on teenage motherhood conceptualises this as a problem, primarily on the pragmatic grounds that it leads to poorer outcomes for mother and child. However, it is argued here that a reliance on statistical risk can lead to a deterministic view of outcomes. It also negates the resilience of some young people, along with the diversity of circumstances and needs of young women.

Chapter Two focuses on the social construction of 'teenage motherhood' within popular discourses. It begins with a case study of newspaper coverage on teenage motherhood, illustrating its discursive construction as a key source of moral decline. This is then placed in a wider context through a brief review of the critical literature on the social construction of teenage motherhood, youth and motherhood. Previous research drawing on 'insider' accounts of motherhood is also reviewed. Few studies have explored the meanings and experiences of early motherhood from the perspectives of young mothers themselves. There has been very little research into young women's accounts of the transition to motherhood, and even less on 'insider views' of early motherhood amongst care leavers. It is these accounts that form the bedrock of this thesis.

Chapter Three provides a rationale for the use of qualitative methods and describes the research process. The research study can be considered to be sensitive on a number of levels and ethical issues are explored in the early part of

this chapter. This is followed by a rationale for the use of qualitative interviewing and, more specifically, for the use of group interviews and individual interviews. The remainder of the chapter consists of a critical reflection on the research process, from the initial stage of gaining a foothold in the organisation (NCH), through the characteristics of the 'sample', to the analysis of interview material using interpretive methods.

Chapters Four to Eight are based on analysis of interview material. Chapters Four and Five describe the transition to motherhood, whilst the remaining chapters deal with accounts of the meanings of motherhood, and analyse the discourses the young women employ. Chapter Four focuses on the young women's accounts of becoming pregnant, and charts their stories from the decision to continue with pregnancy through to its late stages. These accounts reveal that, for many of the young women, pregnancy was a time of considerable adjustment and lifestyle change. Chapter Five explores the young women's accounts of becoming mothers for the first time, taking them from the point of childbirth through to when their baby was around six months old³. It is argued that their accounts are very similar to those reported in research with older mothers. However, the young women appear to have additional pressures to construct stories in ways that allow them to make a claim to being good mothers. They do this through narrating both the difficulties they overcome and the changes they have made in their lives.

Chapter Six takes as its focus the meanings of parenthood. Like other groups of mothers (Woollett and Marshall 2000), the young women experience motherhood as having costs. They acknowledge the difficulties of mothering, particularly in

³ For some, this was up to the present day.

terms of repetitive work and isolation, yet they argue that these difficulties are offset by the love and pride they have for their children. They also describe the role of their children's fathers. They expect equality in childcare yet very few of the fathers have been prepared to share parenting. Moreover, a significant minority of young women have experienced violence at the hands of this or a subsequent partner. Nevertheless, they have firm investments in heterosexual relationships and the family. The second half examines issues of identity, exploring how the young women talk about motherhood in the context of youth and femininity.

Chapter Seven directly examines the young women's ways of talking about 'being a teenage mum'. Evidence is provided that dominant discourses have a real impact upon them in their everyday lives. The young women argue against the 'stereotype' of young women getting pregnant to get a house and benefits, or as promiscuous 'slags'. They also adopt a number of differing rhetorical strategies to defend themselves against such judgmental and condemnatory discourses. These include distancing themselves from 'other teenage mums' and employing a counter-discourse in which good enough mothering is 'not on age, it's on responsibility'.

Chapter Eight specifically explores discursive practices around young mothers who are care leavers, focussing particularly on their experiences of social services. It is argued that motherhood disqualifies care leavers from the status of vulnerable young person, so that the focus of intervention may be exclusively upon their child. The young women assert that professionals often have negative

expectations of their abilities, and that such negative perceptions make a trusting relationship with professionals difficult. In addition, it is argued that there is inadequate support for young mothers who are care leavers in their own right, based on individual need.

In conclusion, it is argued that motherhood makes sense within the young women's socio-cultural worlds, and provides a means of negotiating their social worlds in key dimensions, particularly those of gender and class. The meanings the young women give to motherhood differ, in significant ways, from those of hegemonic discourses. Although early motherhood has a negative impact - financially, educationally and socially - it also has many positive aspects that do not feature in dominant discourses. This thesis, whilst presenting the difficulties, also attempts to retrieve the positive aspects of early motherhood and of the young women's sense of mothering as a key source of achievement and identity.

Chapter One

Teenage Motherhood : A ‘British Disease’?

*Too many teenage mothers – and fathers – simply fail to understand the price they, their children, and society, will pay.
(Blair 1999a)*

This chapter aims to identify and explore the discourses underlying mainstream research and policy concerning early motherhood, with an emphasis on its occurrence amongst care leavers. As such, it addresses the first of my research questions, namely: what are the hegemonic discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood? And more specifically: what are the mainstream academic discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood?

At the heart of mainstream research is the conceptualisation of teenage motherhood as inherently problematic, and this approach is explored in the first section of this chapter. Being a teenage mother, particularly as a care leaver, is seen as a ‘risk factor’ for poor outcomes for both mother and child (Quinton and Rutter 1984, 1985; Social Exclusion Unit [SEU] 1999; Hobcraft and Kiernan 2001). It is also sometimes seen as setting up a ‘cycle of disadvantage’ (Rutter and Madge 1976). In addition, being young, and having been in care are often viewed as placing mothers in a high risk category for child abuse or neglect (Browne and Saqi 1988; Roberts 1988). These factors contribute to the view that teenage motherhood, especially amongst care leavers, is a social and familial problem requiring policy intervention and preventative measures.

The second part of the chapter then revisits these issues from a critical perspective. Demographic evidence is presented that suggests that the rate of teenage motherhood is not increasing, and that the outcomes for teenage mothers and their children may not be as negative as is sometimes claimed. It is argued that theories of 'cycles of abuse' and 'cycles of disadvantage' may be overly deterministic and that some young women show resilience that is inadequately unaccounted for in a 'risk factors' approach. It is argued that teenage motherhood needs to be understood in its social context and within a strengths-led approach to youth, rather than being conceptualised as a form of individual pathology.

The third section focuses on young mothers who are care leavers, placing this in the context of research on young people in care and after care. Recent policy interventions are also briefly considered. Despite a number of recent major reforms, previous research shows that 'socially excluded' young people, care leavers and young mothers remain in urgent need of improved forms of social support (NCH 2000; Local Government Association [LGA] 2001; Care Leavers Association [CLA] 2001). It is argued that, in order to understand why social support continues to be inadequate, it is necessary to go beyond a mainstream approach and examine the discursive context of youth and 'teenage motherhood'.

THE 'PROBLEM' OF TEENAGE MOTHERHOOD: A HIGH PRICE TO PAY?

Britain currently has teenage birth rates twice as high as Germany and six times higher than the Netherlands, making the British rate the highest in Western Europe. In 1997, there were 46,316 live births to women under 20 (Family Policy

Studies Centre [FPSC] 1999; ONS 1999). There has also been a marked rise in the proportion of unmarried teenage mothers in Britain since the 1960s. Even as late as 1971, 42 per cent of babies borne by teenagers were conceived before marriage, but born within marriage (Selman 1996). By 1997, only 5,227 births to teenagers took place within marriage, representing a mere 11.3 per cent of all births to teenagers. It has been estimated that there were 44,000 teenage lone parents in 1996 (Botting et al. 1998).

These are some of the statistics that seem to support widespread public and policy concerns around unmarried teenage mothers and which, in 1999, led the then Government Minister for Public Health, Tessa Jowell, to describe teenage pregnancy as 'the British disease' (Jowell 1999). Particular concern is expressed about higher rates of teenage pregnancy and motherhood amongst some social groups, including care leavers (SEU 1999). Previous research estimates the rate of early motherhood amongst young women who are, or have been in care, to be between one in four (Biehal et al. 1992, 1994) and one in seven (Garnett 1992). Biehal et al. (1995, 1996), found that one in ten young people was a parent at the point of moving to independence / legal discharge from care, but that eighteen to twenty-four months later, when the young people were still under 20, a third were parents and nearly half of the young women were mothers (Biehal et al. 1995). A survey of 110 pregnant and mothering young women (aged 14-17) in London also found that 14.8 per cent were, or had been, in care (Francome 1993).

Risk factors in Teenage Pregnancy and Motherhood

Research suggests that there are a number of psychosocial factors associated with teenage pregnancy, including a disrupted childhood and offending behaviour. Oz and Fine (1988) found that the key factors correlated with teenage motherhood were lower educational attainment, experience of foster care, having an abusive boyfriend, and home instability including family breakdown or violence.

Several authors have found an association between low educational attainment and teenage motherhood (Kiernan 1996, 1997; Hockaday et al. 2000). Kiernan (1996, 1997), using data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) showed an association between lower educational attainment scores and early motherhood, particularly where educational attainment scores deteriorated between childhood and adolescence. Young mothers were more likely to have exhibited emotional problems, particularly during adolescence, and were also more likely to be the child of a teenage mother (Kiernan 1997). Girls who had experienced the divorce of their parents between the ages of 7 and 16 were considered nearly twice as likely to become teenage mothers as those whose parents remained married (Kiernan 1996).

Some studies, both in Britain and the USA, have suggested a higher rate of early motherhood amongst young women who have been physically or sexually abused (Boyer and Fine 1992; Oz and Fine 1988; Farmer and Pollock 1999). Oz and Fine (1988) found that thirty-three per cent of young mothers had been sexually abused, compared with fourteen per cent of those in a control group of non-mothers (N = 74). U.S. research also suggests that the experience of child abuse (both physical

and sexual) amongst young mothers is twice that of the general population (Michael et al. 1994). In Britain, the charity ChildLine states that approximately five per cent of callers phoning about teenage pregnancy also mention sexual abuse (ChildLine 1999).

This evidence is inconclusive, given that estimates of child sexual abuse amongst the general population vary from 3 to 90 per cent depending on the definition of sexual abuse employed (Parton et al. 1997), but it appears to be a possible risk factor for teenage pregnancy. Young women who have been sexually abused may be considered 'easy targets' for sexual exploitation. They may also have low self-esteem and perhaps an acceptance of sexual contact in relationships with men (Farmer and Pollock 1995; Corlyon and McGuire 1999). However, other forms of abuse may also be significant. Herrenkohl et al. (1998) found the association with teenage motherhood was actually stronger for those who had experienced physical abuse alone or in combination with neglect than it was for sexual abuse.

Many studies show that young mothers are more likely to come from economically disadvantaged families (Kiernan 1996, 1997; McKee 1999; Hobcraft and Kiernan 2001), and also from certain minority ethnic groups (Botting et al. 1998; SEU 1999). The likelihood of becoming a teenage mother is almost ten times higher for young women whose family is in social class V, compared with those in social class I¹ (Botting et al. 1998). Using an index of local deprivation, the same authors found a clear correlation between births to teenage women and living in a deprived area. Other studies have also shown strong associations between areas of economic deprivation, high teenage

¹ Using the Registrar General's classification of social class

conception rates, low teenage abortion rates and inequities in sexual health (Gralick et al. 1993; Babb 1994; Nicoll et al. 1999). Those born in Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Caribbean are also considered more likely to become teenage mothers than those born in the UK (Botting et al. 1998; SEU 1999).

Other authors have stressed cultural factors that are implicated in higher rates of teenage motherhood in this country, particularly pertaining to attitudes to sex, abortion and adoption. A related issue is access to contraceptive and sexual health services. Relevant factors include the post-war lowering of the age of first sexual experience, the relatively low abortion rate amongst British teenagers (SEU 1999) and a decrease in the number of adoptions since their peak in the late 1960s (Selman 1996; Page 1997). The post-war era has also seen a significant rise in the proportion of young people reporting having had their first sexual experience before the age of nineteen (Kiernan et al. 1998). Lower rates of teenage pregnancy in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark (Selman and Glendinning 1994; 1996) may be linked to comprehensive programmes of sex education in schools and communities, starting in primary schools. They may also be due to linkages between sex education and information about accessing contraceptive services (Op. cit.). In the Netherlands, there are similar rates of sexual activity amongst young people but contraceptive use is much higher (Bozon and Kontula 1998).

As we have seen, research that seeks to identify factors predisposing young women to early motherhood suggests a complex range including family background, poverty and social attitudes towards sex and sex education. The precise relationship between these factors is unclear, but there does appear to be

an association between social deprivation and becoming a mother at a relatively early age. This in itself does not mean that early motherhood is a problem. There are other social groups who are much more likely to become mothers, such as women in their late twenties, yet women in their twenties are not conceptualised as 'at risk' of pregnancy. Nevertheless, the attention drawn to these factors associated with teenage pregnancy frame it as a problem. Further justification for viewing early motherhood as 'the problem' is derived from quantitative studies of outcomes for mothers and children, which will now be reviewed.

Outcomes: a cycle of disadvantage?

The emphasis, in policy terms, on the prevention of teenage pregnancy is justified by reference to studies that show negative outcomes for both teenage mothers and their children (Rutter and Madge 1976; Botting et al. 1998; Hobcraft and Kiernan 2001). Taking teenage mothers themselves first, this view of outcomes gains some support from recent longitudinal studies. Hobcraft and Kiernan (2001) found, 'clear associations for adult outcomes with age at first birth, even after controlling for childhood poverty and the other childhood background factors' (495).

Others have pointed to a range of negative outcomes for both mother and child, even in studies that control for the impact of poverty. It is argued that teenage mothers are significantly more likely than older women to give birth to underweight babies and to experience a higher rate of infant mortality amongst children under three than older mothers. They are also believed to experience a higher rate of post-natal depression, a lower rate of breast-feeding and more accident-prone children (Botting et al. 1998; SEU 1999).

Claims of negative outcomes for the children of teenage mothers consist largely of two inter-linked components: the first being fears of a 'cycle of disadvantage' (Rutter and Madge 1976), dependency and poor educational attainment; and the second being fears over abuse and neglect of children by teenage mothers. The SEU report (1999) cites research evidence of a range of poor outcomes for children, including a greater likelihood of the female children of teenage mothers becoming teenage mothers themselves, a greater likelihood of living in a lone-parent household and of the separation of parents, increased risk of poverty, poor housing and poor nutrition.

Quinton and Rutter (1984; 1985) argue that the concept of a 'cycle of disadvantage' is particularly relevant to mothers who have been in care. They claim that an experience of poor early attachments, along with limited opportunities for later attachments, has a negative impact on the ability of a young woman to parent, as well as upon her choice of partner. Early parenthood means that a young woman is more likely to continue to live in the same disadvantaged community in which she was raised than her peers and is less likely to enter further education or have a career. Poor housing and the need to claim state benefits, it is argued, may lead to inter-generational poverty.

Other authors claim that the children of teenage mothers are more likely to be victims of physical or emotional abuse, or neglect, of their children (Brown and Saqi 1988; Gillham 1997), due either to socio-economic circumstances or to immaturity. 'Risk factors' for child abuse and neglect include a parent living in poverty and social isolation, and a parent who experienced separation, abuse or

neglect as a child (Browne and Saqi 1988). Roberts, on the other hand, states that 'abusing parents have often been noted for their relative youth and immaturity when embarking on parenthood' (1988: 44). She argues that young deprived parents may look to their child to satisfy unmet dependency needs, or may have unrealistic expectations of their child. Furstenburg (1981) further asserts that young mothers may believe pregnancy will allow them to get their own needs met when they return to their own mothers with a baby.

These may be some of the reasons why child protection concerns often appear to be heightened when the young mother is a care leaver, and are further increased by fears of a cycle of inter-generational sexual abuse. This is exemplified by the work of Glaser and Frosh (1988), who argue that the link may be direct, where a sexually abused individual goes on to be an abuser. However, they also see a 'powerful indirect link' (1988: 21), in that women who have been sexually abused may have an increased vulnerability to sexually exploitative men, and that such women may be less able to protect their own children.

These kinds of concerns can provide justifications for a policy focus on the prevention of teenage pregnancy, particularly amongst care leavers. Indeed, Tony Blair states that teenage pregnancy leads to 'a cycle of despair in which many teenage parents are trapped' (Blair 1999b: 4). However, it would appear that this evidence for an increasing 'problem' of teenage motherhood, and of such families entering a downward spiral of poverty and disadvantage, does not provide the complete picture.

THE 'PROBLEM OF TEENAGE MOTHERHOOD: CRITICAL APPROACHES

Demography revisited

Given an apparent 'epidemic' of teenage mothers, it may seem surprising to note that the number of births to teenage mothers reached its twentieth-century peak in 1966 (at 86,746 births) whilst the rate of teenage births peaked in 1971 (50.6 per 1,000 women aged 16-19) (Selman 1996). Although the rate rose slightly in the 1980s (from its late 1970s position), this was largely accounted for by births to women aged 18 and 19, and it declined between the late 1980s and mid-1990s (Burghes and Brown 1995). The rate of conceptions amongst young women both under and over sixteen rose again slightly in 1996 and 1997, but was still below that of 1991 (Botting et al. 1998; DOH 2001c). The rate of pregnancy amongst girls under 16 has been steady since 1969, with approximately eight girls under 16 in every thousand becoming pregnant each year. In 1997, the vast majority of births to teenage women were to young women between the ages of 16 and 19, with just 3.4 per cent of teenage births to young women under 16. There were three births to 12-year olds, and one to an 11-year old (DOH 2001c).

Teenage mothers also form a small proportion of mothers and, although the rate of unmarried motherhood may be particularly high amongst teenagers, the rate of increase in extramarital births has been higher amongst women in their twenties (Gillham 1997), as has the rate of terminations (Nicoll et al. 1999). Furthermore, the rise in extramarital births amongst teenagers relates, at least in part, to a rise in cohabitation (Botting et al. 1998). Facts such as these do not necessarily mean the rate of early motherhood in Britain is unproblematic, but should lead to a

questioning of the narrative of teenage pregnancy as a contemporary 'epidemic' running out of control.

Background factors revisited

The studies cited previously have tended to correlate early motherhood with socio-economic conditions in a manner which suggests that such factors express themselves as personality flaws. A structural analysis, on the other hand, takes account of divisions of class, ethnicity and gender, and of the ways in which they intersect with youth. It is argued here that the emphasis in mainstream policy on teenage pregnancy as *the* problem needs interrogating. Rates of early motherhood in Britain did not fall during the 1980s, at a time when they were falling in neighbouring countries. However, over the period 1984 to 1997, the numbers of people aged 16 to 24 in the British labour market shrank by nearly 40 per cent (Land 1996; Coleman 1999). The current social climate is one in which young people face high rates of unemployment, homelessness and inadequate social security benefits (Coles 1995; MacDonald 1997; Fergusson et al. 2000). As Selman and Glendinning note, there is 'poverty, unemployment, low self-esteem and lack of hope for the future among significant proportions of young people' (1996: 203). Moreover, young women who have very few prospects of training or work can find motherhood a source of pride and satisfaction (McRobbie 1991; Phoenix 1992; Campbell 1993a) and a means of constructing an identity when other options are limited (Musick 1993; Craine 1997). Flanagan notes that, 'early pregnancies are a response to these girls' perceptions of, and the reality of, their life options' (1998: 241), and deferment of motherhood may make little sense to young working-class women with limited opportunities (Phoenix 1992).

However, as we have seen, mainstream policy approaches to teenage pregnancy often have an individualistic and pathologising character. Concerns with young women's fertility decision-making blame the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy either upon deficiencies in young women's cultural backgrounds or on their 'inadequate' knowledge of contraception, rather than on structures of poverty and subordination (Phoenix 1991a, 1992). Where they do take account of poverty, it is to comment on a 'cycle of disadvantage', thereby placing the blame once again on the individual or family in poverty. As McMahon argues:

Collapsing the potential meanings of motherhood into the discourse of personal choice allows inequality in the conditions in which women have children to be seen as legitimate. (1995: 128)

The over-representation of particular minority ethnic groups amongst young mothers can also be explained by material deprivation. However, teenage motherhood amongst young black women, particularly those from African Caribbean backgrounds, is often believed to be due to 'cultural difference'. Phoenix argues that this focus on 'cultural' reasons is based on a mistaken notion of homogeneity amongst black young women. In fact, she points out, the majority of black young women are British, and moreover, it is not possible to make generalisations about 'Caribbean culture'. In fact, material conditions are more likely to be the key factor in teenage motherhood, amongst both black and white young women (Phoenix 1992).

Attention also needs to be paid to gender relations of power. A shift in power relations between men and women could lead to a fall in teenage pregnancies, both by giving young women wider social and economic opportunities in their

lives, and more power and control in sexual relationships. For example, a study of American high school drop-outs found that attitudes of young women towards contraception and abortion 'shifted once they acquired a set of vocational skills, a sense of social entitlement, and a sense of personal competence' (Fine 1988). Other authors assert that, leaving aside concerns about teenage pregnancy, improvements in both the self-esteem and the social power of young women are urgently needed. This could enable young women to gain more control over their sexual pleasure (Pipher 1994; Taylor et al. 1995; Holland et al. 1998). For a young woman to negotiate safer sex in a heterosexual relationship, she needs to be empowered at both intellectual and experiential levels (Holland et al. 1990). This empowerment enables her both to develop a positive conception of feminine sexuality, and to be able to put it into practice. This is not simply a question of encouraging more assertive individuals. What is required is a shift in the balance of power between men and women (Holland et al. 1998).

Outcomes revisited

The concepts of cycles of disadvantage and abuse can be criticised on several levels. There is a tendency to conceptualise these in the same way as inherited diseases and this can lead to negative, and in some cases, punitive attitudes and practices towards the victims of economic and emotional deprivation or abuse. There is also a lack of clear, incontrovertible evidence of cycles of disadvantage (Brown and Madge 1982), or of abuse (Kaufman and Zigler 1993). Rutter and Madge, commissioned in 1972 to review the relevant literature, found 'moderate continuities' between generations but these were often associated with structural factors, such as living in an area marked by social deprivation. There was some

evidence to suggest continuity in abusive and neglectful parenting, but the authors concluded that more research was needed (Rutter and Madge 1976). A programme of over 37 studies on the 'cycle of disadvantage' which followed this review found that 'continuities are by no means inevitable and there is no general sense in which "like begets like" ' (Brown and Madge 1982: 143).

Negative findings concerning the outcomes of early motherhood have also been questioned. Allen and Bourke-Dowling (1998) found that teenage motherhood often results in negative social and economic outcomes in the short-term for young women. However, many young women were happy to be mothers, in stable relationships, were not living on benefits and had their own accommodation. These authors assert the need to treat teenage mothers as heterogeneous with diverse circumstances and needs. Others point out that negative outcomes are due to socio-economic circumstances and to the fact that young mothers are likely to be having their first child (Phoenix 1991a). While it is sometimes argued that early motherhood 'traps' young women in poverty (SEU 1999; Hobcraft and Kiernan 2001), it is also an outcome of poverty (Phoenix 1991; Luker 1996; Flanagan 1998). To blame motherhood for the continuation of such poverty seems to be, at best, missing the point and at worst, a form of 'victim-blaming'.

Three U.S. studies support this British work. Furstenberg et al. (1989) argue that, although young mothers face clear disadvantages in socio-economic status and educational attainment, over time these differences disappear. Rich and Kim (1999) found that, by seven years after childbirth, 40 per cent of mothers who gave birth in their teens had improved their levels of regular education. Flanagan's

(1998) research on the cognitive development of young mothers also supports the view that early motherhood cannot be assumed to have negative outcomes. She argues that young mothers are at a variety of developmental stages and that cognitive development does not necessarily equate with chronological age. Very young mothers are sometimes well in advance of their expected developmental stage and older mothers may be slower to mature thus requiring more assistance. Flanagan concludes that young mothers should to be treated on the basis of individual needs, taking their developmental stage into account.

Evidence regarding outcomes for children of teenage mothers is also ambiguous. Phoenix (1991a) found that the children of teenage mothers, tested for developmental status at age 21 months, showed no cause for concern, with many scoring above the standardised norm. A Swedish cohort study by Timms (1996) showed that, although the mental health of men born to teenage mothers was worse than the mental health of those born to older mothers, these differences disappeared once controls were introduced for the women's marital and socio-economic status. This suggests that socio-economic factors may primarily determine outcomes, rather than the mother's age.

The association of child abuse and neglect with teenage mothering is also questioned by some. Firstly, there is a problem inherent in a 'risk factors' approach to the prediction of child abuse, which Parton terms the 'statistical fallacy' (Parton et al. 1998: 61). Browne and Sagi's (1988) research illustrates this. They found that, whilst the checklist of risk factors used by midwives and health visitors successfully identified 86 per cent of potential cases of abuse or

neglect, nearly a third of families in which abuse occurred were initially categorised as 'low risk', and six per cent of non-abusing families were assessed to be 'high risk'. These authors also assert that the emphasis placed upon teenage parents as potential abusers may be due to a conflation of youth and class. Most abusing parents studied have been working-class, and working-class parents tend to be younger than middle-class parents. Thus, the average age of the abusing parent is likely to be comparatively low in such studies, and the apparent association may be a design fault of the research (Brown and Saqi 1988).

A feminist perspective on child abuse has also highlighted significant gender differences amongst the perpetrators of abuse which place the 'cycles of abuse' argument in further doubt. According to Creighton (1988), women predominate in cases of emotional abuse and neglect and are equally likely to physically abuse as men. However, the picture for sexual abuse is very different, as the evidence points overwhelmingly to a very low proportion of female sexual abusers (Kelly et al. 1995). Glaser and Frosh (1988) argue that women may be implicated indirectly, and women are frequently seen as colluding in sexual abuse. However, as Driver and Droisen argue, 'collusion implies equal access to information and power', which many women do not possess (Driver and Droisen 1989).

Thus, the 'cycle of abuse' argument may be overly deterministic. Of course it is more difficult to become economically self-supporting and achieve one's personal potential if born into a poor household with few resources available. A history of childhood abuse or neglect may also make it more difficult to cope at certain points. However, what is at issue is the tendency for disadvantage and abuse to be

seen as directly passed on from generation to generation, where the focus of intervention then becomes the behaviour of individuals and, in some cases, punitive attitudes and practices.

It is also important to note that some children and young people display considerable resilience in the face of adversity. Resilience 'involves interplay between specific risks, individual differences in life events experienced, personality, temperamental qualities and environmental factors, such as social support' (Payne 1999: 3). The concept has been employed by researchers interested in why some children and young people in care do *not* develop conduct disorders and mental health difficulties, despite being at high risk of doing so (Rutter 1979, 1985; Luthar 1991, 1993). It may also be helpful in explaining how some young people in care appear to cope well with a range of transitions, despite their experience of negative life events. Evidence of resilience may also explain why some people do not pass on 'cycles of disadvantage and abuse' to the next generation.

EARLY MOTHERHOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF LEAVING CARE

Earlier sections have explored the 'cycles of disadvantage' approach, and it has been argued that the situation of young mothers can best be analysed in relation to structural conditions and relations. For young mothers who have been in care, this is particularly relevant, because care leavers form one of the most vulnerable and socially deprived groups, yet provision for them on leaving care is frequently inadequate. Furthermore, rates of early motherhood, as we have seen, are estimated to be relatively high amongst this group. The combination of these two

factors means that the theory of a 'cycle of disadvantage' could, again, be seen as a case of 'blaming the victim'. In this section, information on young people leaving care is provided, followed by a consideration of previous research on those who become young mothers.

Children and young people in care

In March 1998, 53,300 children and young people were being 'looked after' in England (Social Trends 2000). Children and young people in care are likely to experience frequent moves and unsuitable placements (DOH 1997), and bullying and abuse by other residents (Sinclair and Gibbs 1998; DOH 1997). There is also inadequate training and vetting of child care staff (DOH 1997). Wolkind and Rutter (1973) found a strong association, particularly for girls, between the length of time spent in care and behavioural disturbance, suggesting that being in care can exacerbate or cause distress, rather than creating security and stability. Clearly this is not so for all young people, but the key point here is that young people leaving the care system are often vulnerable, yet the support services they receive are frequently inadequate.

Leaving care

A total of 7,100 young people left care in England in 2000. Of these, 3,300 had been living with foster parents, 1,500 in children's homes, 1,300 living independently and 420 with parents (DOH 2001a). Over the past few years there has been a rise in the proportion of young people leaving care at ages 16 and 17, rather than at 18 (Stein and Wade 2000; DOH 2001a). Care leavers also move to independence at a significantly younger age than their peers do (Jones 1987;

Banks et al. 1992). Furthermore, young people in their late teens tend to move in and out of the family home and this option is rarely available to care leavers. Biehal et al. (1992, 1994) found that only a quarter of care leavers returned to or remained in the family home on leaving care (Biehal et al. 1992,1994).

Care leavers often face difficulties upon moving to independence. These exist at three levels: issues of social justice (structural inequalities, such as poverty and racism); those of social welfare (such as poor or inadequate parenting); and technical difficulties (such as a lack of necessary skills) (Broad 1999). Care leavers also often lack adequate preparation for independent living. The development of life skills, such as self-care, practical skills and interpersonal skills while in care may be inconsistent, and the specific needs (in terms of identity and self-care) of black young people are not always considered (Biehal et al. 1995; Ince 1998).

Research over a number of years has revealed the urgent need for increased, nationally consistent and ongoing support for young people in care and after care (Broad 1998; DOH 1999b; Stein and Wade 2000), yet support available to care leavers varies enormously (Broad 1998, 1999). A recent national study (Broad 1999) identified sixty-one projects working exclusively with care leavers in England and Wales, and a further fourteen working with care leavers and other vulnerable young people. Within a few months of leaving care, a quarter of care leavers may be receiving no professional support at all (Biehal et al. 1994), and the risk of this is increased further for black young people (West 1995). Financial support also varies markedly between local authorities, from £0 to £1,800, due to

the discretionary nature² of local authority support (West 1995).

Care leavers are likely to face difficulties relating to education and employment, housing and birth family relationships. Around 75 per cent are estimated to have no educational qualifications (Garnett 1992), and 50-88 per cent to be unemployed (Meegan 1996; Broad 1999). Educational under-attainment is explained by disruption and movement whilst in care (Garnett 1992; Biehal et al. 1995), low expectations of young people in care by professionals (Garnett 1992), and the stigma of being in care, which can lead to bullying or patronizing treatment in schools (West 1995). These factors are compounded by the structural problems of care leavers living in areas of high unemployment (Biehal et al. 1995).

Care leavers also frequently experience difficulties in finding and keeping suitable and stable accommodation. Biehal et al. (1992) found that 15 per cent were homeless within 3 to 9 months of moving to independence or legal discharge from care. Family links may also be problematic. Biehal et al. (1996) found that, although 81 per cent had some contact with family members in the early months after leaving care, only half had reasonably positive supportive relationships with one or both parents 18 to 24 months after leaving care. Well over a quarter had no contact or poor relationships with both parents and extended family members at this time (Biehal et al. 1996).

In summary, care leavers are likely to be inadequately prepared for independent living during their time in care and may face a range of difficulties on moving to independence. As Stein and Carey remark, 'in a sense leaving care is being

² The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 should change this situation. See page 43-44.

expected to assume instant maturity' (Stein and Carey 1986). However, whilst care leavers have a compressed and accelerated transition (Biehal et al. 1996), they may find that their social status as 'adults' is partial, ambiguous and contradictory.

The experience of early motherhood amongst care leavers

The circumstances of young mothers who are care leavers reflect those of care leavers in general. Biehal et al. (1992) found that, of the 20 young mothers in their study of care leavers (N = 87), none was in paid employment or education, and they were particularly likely to have no qualifications. Over 75 per cent were in tenancies, compared with 25 per cent of those without children. Two young mothers were homeless. Very few of the young parents were men, and no male parents were living with their children. The young mothers received only slightly more professional help than the sample as a whole, and this was primarily from social workers. Only three had support from a leaving care scheme, and four were receiving no professional help at all.

In a later study by the same authors (Biehal et al. 1995), over a third of young parents stated that their pregnancies had been planned. Most of these were aged 18 or 19, and were setting up a home and family with their partner. Within 18 to 24 months of leaving care, over a third were living with partners. Only six young women lived as single parents throughout the study period. The young parents had experienced difficulties relating to housing and poverty, social isolation and social stigma. Just under half had mostly positive relationships with family members.

Corlyon and McGuire (1999) locate the key reasons for early motherhood in the culture of residential care, and particularly attitudes to sexual relationships. They assert that living in care provides both extra pressure and extra opportunities for young people to start sexual relationships at an earlier age. They also argue that young people in care seem to have limited experience of positive relationships with adults who can act as role models, and tend to aspire to early marriage and parenthood more than their peers. This aspiration, they argue, is particularly true of young men. Young people in care also have many decisions made for them, so have little experience of decision-making or planning for the future.

Biehal et al. (1995) locate the reasons for early motherhood more in the social circumstances of care leavers. They propose three main reasons for the comparatively high rate of early motherhood amongst this group. Firstly, the 'class cultural context' of leaving care: of poverty, poor educational attainment, and poor employment opportunities. Early motherhood, they suggest, is most prevalent amongst those care leavers whose career routes are characterised by insecurity (unemployment, casual work, and unstable youth training), as these factors make the deferment of parenthood unnecessary and unattractive (Biehal et al. 1995). Secondly, they suggest that early motherhood can be a means of gaining access to an adult identity, thus attaining status and a feeling of being responsible. This is linked to the accelerated nature of the transitions faced by care leavers. The creation of an 'alternative family base' may meet a need for security, support and a sense of belonging (Biehal et al. 1996). This argument is supported by Stein and Carey (1986), who state that the young parents in their study:

had a feeling of having produced something of their own, of having created new persons who belonged to them, as well as having created new identities for themselves as parents. This helped to compensate for their own loss of a sense of self while in care. (Stein and Carey 1986: 73-4)

Thirdly, Biehal et al. suggest that early parenthood may be motivated by the need to belong, to have someone to love, and to compensate for the lack of care that the young parents received as children (Biehal et al. 1996).

These studies highlight the difficult social circumstances of young mothers who are care leavers and the frequent lack of available support. This, despite the fact that, in the absence of contact with their birth family, the state is supposed to perform the function of 'corporate parent' (Broad 1999). Researchers have documented the severe disadvantage faced by care leavers in general over many years, yet, in spite of a number of policy interventions, little has changed. In terms of early motherhood amongst care leavers, Corlyon and McGuire (1999) argue that local authorities need to develop policies, procedures, and services both to provide adequate sex education for young people in public care, and to support young women who become pregnant. Biehal et al. (1995), on the other hand, focus on support for young mothers as care leavers, and argue the need for a range of accommodation provision, and for the extension of leaving care schemes. Nevertheless, it must be asked why, despite good intentions, these problems seem so intractable, and why there has been very little change in the life chances of vulnerable young people over the past few years.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

The current Labour Government has a stated aim of improving services for vulnerable young people (Rough Sleepers Unit 2000; Dobson 1999) and young people form an important component of the work of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU 1999, 2000). There are three main areas of policy of particular relevance to this research: the prevention of teenage pregnancy, support for young mothers, and support for care leavers and other vulnerable young people.

The New Labour Government has viewed the prevention of teenage pregnancy as a high priority. Following the publication of the Teenage Pregnancy Report (SEU 1999), the Teenage Pregnancy Unit (TPU) was established in order to implement an 'action plan' on teenage pregnancy. The Department of Health aims to halve the number of conceptions to under 18-year olds by 2010, with an interim target, under the NHS plan, of a 15 per cent reduction by 2004 (TPU 2001).

A number of new schemes and policies are currently being piloted and implemented (TPU 2001). Local authorities in England now all have Teenage Pregnancy Coordinators in place who are developing ten-year teenage pregnancy strategies aimed at decreasing conception rates. There have also been significant national initiatives, beginning in October 2000 with a media campaign involving adverts in teenage magazines and on national radio. The 'Sexwise' young people's telephone advice line has received further funding and thus increased capacity. Advice line operators have a database providing details of local confidential services around sexual health for young people (TPU 2001). SureStart Plus pilot projects have also been set up in fifteen areas. These will provide advice to

pregnant young women to assist in their decision over pregnancy, adoption or abortion.

In addition to these general policy initiatives, there have been initiatives aimed specifically at the sexual health needs of young women who are, or who have been, in care. Guidance for youth workers, social workers and foster carers is being developed to assist them in making referrals to sexual health services (DOH 2001b). 'Quality Protects' guidance also asks local authorities to state what is being done to reduce teenage pregnancy amongst young women in care, and to support young mothers in care, as part of their Children's Services Plan (DOH 2001b).

As can be seen from these measures, considerable resources are currently being put into decreasing the teenage pregnancy rate. Although the emphasis is on pregnancy prevention, initiatives aimed at providing support for teenage mothers have also been developed. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy includes a number of schemes targeted at young mothers, particularly focussing on helping them into education and the workplace. Advisers within SureStart Plus pilot projects will provide support to help young parents (both mothers and fathers) with education and employment. In addition, childcare pilot schemes for young parents have been set up in five areas, with the DEE contributing up to £100 to childcare costs, and are set to run until the end of 2003. Education Maintenance Allowance pilot schemes in forty areas will also provide up to £40 a week to 16 and 17-year old parents who are on a low income. Teenage mothers will be able to take maternity leave, and will receive a bonus to encourage them to return to education after

giving birth. Finally, six supported housing schemes for 16 and 17-year old lone parents unable to live with their parents are currently being piloted, offering supervised accommodation rather than tenancies (TPU 2001).

Many of these measures offer the promise of more informed choice and support around pregnancy, and more support for young mothers. Increased funding of organisations offering advice to young people, in addition to the provision of personal advisers under the SureStart Plus scheme, may go some way towards enabling young women to make this decision on the basis of impartial advice and support. However, it is important that such advice is truly impartial. The evidence to be presented in this thesis suggests that the assumption that teenage motherhood is inherently problematic must be avoided if such advice is to be useful to young women.

In addition to policies in relation to teenage pregnancy/motherhood, there have been a number of recent policy changes affecting care leavers. In 1999, a DOH consultation document on services for care leavers highlighted the gaps in after care provision, stating 'some young people leaving care have been let down badly. They have been expected to cope with independence too early and with too little support' (DOH 1999b: 8). In Section 24(6) and (7) of the Children Act 1989, local authorities were empowered (but not obliged) to give material assistance to care leavers. This lack of obligation has led to a 'postcode lottery' for young people, whereby some receive far more in the way of support than others. In the wake of this, the consultation document 'Me? Survive, Out There' (DOH 1999b) contained specific proposals to strengthen the duties of local authorities to provide material

and personal support for care leavers. These proposals formed the basis of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which came into force in October 2001.

This new act places upon local authorities a *duty* (rather than the power) to support care leavers up to at least the age of 21. Local authorities now have a statutory duty to assess and meet the needs (including financial needs) of 16 and 17-year olds who are, or who have been 'looked after' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14. Each young person has a personal advisor, with whom they will plan a comprehensive 'pathway plan' to leaving care and into education, training or employment, which will be regularly reviewed. The advisor will continue to provide support to the age of 21, or to the end of the education or training programme where this takes them over the age of 21. Local authorities also have a duty to stay in touch with care leavers and to provide personal and practical support. In addition, entitlement to social security benefits has been removed from care leavers, who will instead receive financial support from the Department of Health through local authorities (HMSO 2000).

The Quality Protects programme also aims to improve services for 'looked after' children and young people. Launched by the Department of Health in 1998, it aims to improve the care experiences of children and young people. One of its key objectives is to 'ensure that young persons leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens' (DOH 1999b: 47-8). Support for care leavers was identified as a priority area for use of a Children's Social Services Special Grant, totalling £375 million. In addition, local authorities are encouraged to improve assessment of needs and to draw up

aftercare plans and were required to submit Management Action Plans, including spending, stating how they intended to improve Leaving Care services (DOH 1999b: 47-8).

It is to be hoped that these changes will result in considerable and long overdue improvements in leaving care services. However, such services have been neglected for so long that there is a danger that they may not be adequate. Several organisations have voiced concerns about their implementation, including NCH, Barnardos, Centrepont, the CLA and the LGA, and concerns about resourcing have been expressed by the LGA (2001) and NCH (2000). Changes in the benefit system will mean that care leavers are financially supported by social services, with funding set in line with income support levels, thus not taking into account the additional needs of care leavers (Cook 2001). The simple transfer of current benefits to the ring-fenced 'account' to support young people will not be adequate to meet needs such as accommodation, as under 25s receive reduced benefits and under claim. There will need to be higher levels of support. (LGA 2001)

The need for adequate staffing levels amongst the personal advisers is stressed by Centrepont (2000), who argue that assisting young people in getting and sustaining accommodation requires the accumulation of independent living skills. This requires intensive support at times, and hence a relatively low caseload for advisers. Other concerns voiced by voluntary sector organisations relate to the current scarcity of social housing, and the consequent need to assess and check private landlords (National Foster Care Association 2000).

The measures enshrined in the new act have also been criticised as insufficient by care leavers. The CLA argues that the care system damages children, and the state therefore has a moral duty to apologise for the treatment of many children in care and to provide adequate after care services. These services should be flexible and open-ended, recognising that leaving care is not simply a set of transitions but an ongoing process. The repercussions of time in care, according to the CLA, can have life-long consequences. As such, the state, as 'corporate parent', has a duty to provide access to records, in order that adults who grew up in care are able to construct their life story. Counselling should also be provided for people who have been in care, (and particularly for those who were abused in care) regardless of age (CLA 2001; Frampton 2001).

There are also concerns that the changes may have unintended negative consequences for other vulnerable young people, leaving services for them under-resourced (LGA 2001). Homeless young people will have to continue to live on lower benefit levels with little support, whilst care leavers move into a new programme of financial assistance. What is really urgently required is an adequate safety net for all vulnerable young people.

To summarise, in recent times there has been a number of policy initiatives relevant to the young women in this study. Whilst these changes are very positive, the neglect of disadvantaged young people, in policy, over a prolonged period means that there is a possibility that such measures may not provide sufficient financial, practical and emotional support to enable them to 'catch up' with their peers. Moreover, it is not sufficient to analyse the policy arena purely in terms of

legislation. The ways in which policy is translated into practice are shaped by hegemonic discourses around youth, gender and mothering. This should lead us to examine the balance between support and surveillance of young mothers, particularly those who have a care history. These discursive practices form the focus of Chapter Two, and are further developed in Chapter Eight.

CONCLUSION

The major aim of this chapter has been, firstly, to sketch, the policy-oriented research regarding young mothers – particularly those who have been in care – and, secondly, to identify the current policy framework that surrounds young care leavers. This mainstream research examined in the early parts of this chapter suggests that teenage motherhood is a social problem that needs to be tackled through policy interventions. However, whilst teenage motherhood is often blamed for leading to, or at least for sustaining unemployment and poverty, care leavers face a strong likelihood of unemployment and poverty regardless of whether they become parents.

Some quantitative studies have presented evidence suggesting that the children of young mothers may become caught in a ‘cycle of disadvantage’, and that teenage mothers constitute a high risk in child protection terms. However, my argument is that this approach has a tendency to be overly deterministic. Whilst statistical data can indicate an increased rate, a tendency is sometimes translated into an inevitability. This negates the resilience and determination of some young people to do both the best for their children and to live their lives in a different way from that of their parents or carers. The ‘cycle of disadvantage/abuse’ hypotheses also

mean that the cause becomes located in the individual. Care leavers, and young people who have survived abuse are labelled as 'damaged goods' (Sanford 1991; Frampton 2001), so that any failure is seen as an outcome of their past, rather than the lack of support services available to them.

One of key strengths of mainstream approaches is that they draw attention to the range of problems faced by some young people growing up in circumstances of socio-economic disadvantage. However, despite these strengths, they sometimes appear to fail to grasp the complexity of young women's life worlds. Furthermore, a 'risk assessment' approach, combined with an emphasis on prevention of teenage mothering, can result in the obscuring both of the vulnerability of some young women who become mothers, and of their support needs. Pregnancy and motherhood are not without their difficulties for very young women (Phoenix 1991a; Schofield 1994). However, I would argue for the use of the concept of empowerment rather than of risk. This may enable young women who do become pregnant to make informed choices whilst receiving appropriate support, and also to enable young women to be seen as individuals with a number of roles, of which motherhood is (a particularly central) one.

Chapter Two

Hegemonic Discourses of ‘Teenage Mothers’

I believe now that it is the decent majority, who play by the rules, who want us to take a lead in defining a new moral purpose. (Blair 1999a)

This statement by the Prime Minister, in response to an apparent epidemic of ever younger girls becoming pregnant, implicitly marked off an ‘indecent’ minority who do not play by the rules. This minority contained teenage parents and their families. In order to analyse how some of the most oppressed and vulnerable young people take on the appearance of a moral threat, this chapter examines the social construction of teenage motherhood.

The demographic evidence concerning teenage motherhood is not neutral, but is socially located, resulting from how ‘problems’ are constructed as worthy of categorisation and measurement (Murcott 1980). Teenage motherhood is currently constructed primarily as a problem for society, as a key factor in the reproduction of an ‘underclass’ (Murray 1990; 1996). In deconstructing this, it is necessary to place the issue in the context of wider discourses of motherhood and youth.

The chapter begins with an examination of recent discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood, through a case study of English newspapers during 1999. This forms part of an exploration of the question: what are the hegemonic popular discourses of teenage pregnancy and motherhood, as represented in media discourses? During the time of this media coverage, teenage pregnancy/motherhood was a particularly strong locus of moral panic, and this

case study provides important contextualisation for the young women's accounts presented in later chapters.

This second section of the chapter explores how hegemonic popular discourses relate to wider discourses of youth and motherhood. The case study is placed in this broader context through a brief overview of the critical literature that seeks to deconstruct hegemonic discourses of 'teenage mothers', youth and motherhood. This literature is extensive, and the discussion provided here is restricted to an overview of the most important arguments. The central claim is that dominant discourses around motherhood and mothering function to police the boundaries of motherhood. Such policing leads to the exclusion of certain groups of women from the category of 'mother', or at the very least, from claiming to be 'good-enough mothers'. Teenage mothers form one such group.

The final section of the chapter contrasts these hegemonic discourses with research on 'insider accounts' of both motherhood and teenage motherhood. Thus, it begins to explore my second set of research questions, concerned with the meanings of motherhood for young women (see page 13). These studies provide insights into the views and experiences of women who are both a source of intense documentation and debate, but are also often marginalised from both academic and popular discourses of motherhood. This literature is central to the thesis, as it is primarily concerned with young women's accounts and the discourses they draw upon in talking about motherhood and mothering.

THE CHARTING OF A 'MORAL PANIC'

During the time when the fieldwork for this study was undertaken, between May 1999 and May 2000, teenage pregnancy and motherhood were frequently at, or near the top of, the news agenda. This began to escalate in June 1999, following the release of the SEU Report on teenage pregnancy (SEU 1999). It then reached a peak following reports of three pregnant 12-year old girls during the months of August and September. A search of English national newspapers¹ produced 140 items relating to teenage pregnancy and parenthood over this six-month period, including news items, features, leaders and readers' letters. These items were analysed to establish the number of articles on each story, and for themes. This was followed by a more detailed discourse analysis of the reporting of key events.

Before examining this newspaper coverage in detail, it is first necessary to set it in the context of debates around the concept of 'moral panic'. The notion that teenage pregnancy and motherhood has been a source of moral panics has been made by several authors (Griffin 1993a; Selman and Glendinning 1996; Page 1997). According to the original formulation, a moral panic consists of the definition of a 'problem', leading to selective reporting in the media. This leads to a 'signification spiral'² (Hall and Jefferson 1976), in which the specific issue becomes linked to other perceived problems by drawing on established discursive formations. This sets up a moral panic, leading to a law and order campaign (Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1976; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Although some

¹ Conducted using Lexis-Nexis Executive, an electronic database of national and international newspapers, including all major English daily and Sunday newspapers; both broadsheet and tabloid.

² I choose this formulation over Cohen's use of the term 'deviancy amplification spiral', due to the association of the latter with both *real* and perceived increases in the deviant behaviour, as a *result* of the moral panic.

difference of opinion exists amongst theorists concerning the main features of moral panics, it is generally agreed that they are characterised by high levels of concern over the behaviour of a particular group, hostility towards this group, volatility and disproportionality (Thompson 1998).

However, the concept has been called into question in recent years, on the grounds that it is overused, and because such scares appear to no longer be self-contained sets of events, but a constant stream (McRobbie 1994b; McRobbie and Thornton 1995). It has also been suggested that the proliferation of interest groups who have access to the media means that there is now space for 'folk devils' (Cohen 1972) to 'fight back' and even to be active in fuelling such panics (McRobbie 1994a; McRobbie and Thornton 1995).

Such arguments have strengths in taking account of recent cultural changes. Nonetheless, I would argue that they do not significantly undermine the moral panics thesis. The charge that 'folk devils' may encourage moral panics may be true of leisure subcultures such as Acid House (McRobbie and Thornton 1995), but appears to have less application to particularly vulnerable groups such as young single mothers. I would also question McRobbie's (1994a) suggestion that 'folk devils' such as young single mothers have significant input into such debates. Where they do appear in media stories during a moral panic, it seems that their voices are very largely interpreted within the dominant discursive formation, leading to further demonisation. As I intend to show, both young mothers and young people who have been in care are the subjects and objects of moral panics over 'dangerous' youth. This can have implications for young people's self-

perception and identity, as well as material consequences. In turn, it is their structural powerlessness and marginality that make young care leavers and young parents easy targets of 'moral panics'.

However, a valid criticism of the standard moral panics argument is the claim that they are, by definition, short-lived (Thompson 1998). In contemporary society they are pervasive, and can be viewed as an aspect of the 'risk society' (Beck 1992), or as power struggles over moral regulation (Hall et al. 1976; Thompson 1998). This point is made particularly cogently by Watney (1987), who argues that moral panics over AIDS and sexuality should be viewed in the context of the wider policing of sexuality:

We do not in fact witness the unfolding of discontinuous and discrete 'moral panics', but rather the mobility of ideological confrontation across the entire field of public representations, and in particular those handling and evaluating the meanings of the human body, where rival and incompatible forces and values are involved in a ceaseless struggle to define supposedly universal 'human' truths'. (42)

Thus, I would argue that moral panics are moments of particular focus, in which there is a reassertion of the moral order. They apparently move from one issue to another, but underlying apparently disparate panics is often the policing of youth, sexuality, femininity and the family. The moral panic over teenage mothers, which took on new proportions during 1999, was not an isolated occurrence. Rather, it was a particular crystallisation of media attention around a set of issues, which had been an ongoing source of moral anxiety, regulation and control at least since the rise of 'disciplinary' practices in the early nineteenth century (Foucault 1977).

The case study

Turning to the newspaper coverage for 1999, analysis for the month of May revealed only five articles on the issue of teenage pregnancy/motherhood, and these did not contain the tone of moral approbation associated with a 'moral panic'. However, in June, there was major media coverage and comment on the publication of the SEU report on teenage pregnancy. Twenty-five articles on the subject were published, nearly all in the second half of the month, in the wake of the report. A key feature of this was its framing within a 'numbers game' (Hall 1982). In other words, the problem of teenage pregnancy became established as an 'epidemic' of rising rates of teenage pregnancy, which took on the appearance of fact and underpinned later news coverage on the issue. As the headline of a leader article in *The Independent* put it, 'Frank words needed to stem the tide of teenage pregnancies' (14 June 1999). This assumption was further fuelled by Tessa Jowell, then Minister for Public Health, who referred to, 'this dreadful and rising level of teenage pregnancy' (cited in Jones, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 June 1999). The 'epidemic' then formed the basis for considerable newspaper debate over the role of the fathers of the babies of teenage mothers (so-called 'boy fathers'), sex education, and the proposal to (re)introduce 'hostel' accommodation for 16 and 17-year old mothers.

Once the 'epidemic' was established, much media coverage was framed by a discourse of an irresponsible underclass, in which teenage pregnancy was articulated with poor parenting, the irresponsibility of youth, economic dependency, promiscuity, disease and moral degeneracy. Almost all of this newspaper coverage was unremittingly negative, condemnatory and punitive in

tone, as demonstrated by the following quotations, from both broadsheets and tabloids in June:

She's 19, had 4 children by 3 fathers and wants more. She kicked in all the doors of her house and expects the council to repair them. She's the problem... so are hostels the solution? (Self and McLaughlin, headline in *The Mail on Sunday*, 13/06/99)

At the root of the problem would seem to be young people's distaste for work of any kind. (Chancellor, *The Guardian*, 19/06/99)

An epidemic of teenage pregnancies, leading over time to a hereditary underclass of single-parent families who transmit their blighted practices from mother to daughter. (*The Daily Telegraph*, leading article, 15/06/99)

This last quotation exhibits two particularly interesting features. Firstly, it uses the language of both contagious and inherited disease, through associations of the terms 'epidemic', 'hereditary', 'transmit' and 'blighted'. Secondly, it shows clearly how the 'epidemic' had taken on the appearance of fact, and how this was then discursively linked to an explanation of which group is to blame. This type of linkage has been previously noted in relation to newspaper coverage of another moral issue affecting youth, that of truancy:

What is interesting about such [newspaper] accounts is the way in which they lead on from a *statistic* (...) to a *conclusion* defining truancy as *causally* related to 'destitution, criminality and poor economic performance' (Carlen et al., 1992:41. Italics in original).

The media coverage of teenage pregnancy similarly established the 'facts' that (i) teenage pregnancy was escalating out of control, (ii) this was pathological, and (iii) punitive measures were justified.

In July and August 1999, newspaper coverage of the issue died down. Although the *Daily Mail* continued to publish occasional items presenting young mothers as

'feckless' (Cunningham, *Daily Mail*, 14/07/99; Mollard, *Daily Mail*, 17/07/99), overall, interest became less at this point. Nevertheless, because awareness of the issue had already been heightened by the SEU report, when a 12-year old girl gave birth to a baby in Rotherham in late August, media coverage was intense, with fourteen articles on this story between 28 August and 1 September. Coverage focused on shock and moral outrage at the incident. In this case, the girl is seen as a victim of crime: 'Family's agony over Mum aged 12: 'We will stand by her but the Dad should be caged' (Hannon and Key, *The People*, 29/08/99). Whilst the young woman herself was seen as innocent, the unknown father of the child, and her family (and particularly her mother, who had been a teenage mother) were presented as villains. *The Independent* reported that,

She was a child dressed in the borrowed robes of precocious adulthood. Once we had gymslip mums to worry about. Now we have dynasties of teenage pregnancies begetting more teen pregnancies. (McElvoy, *The Independent*, 1/09/99)

The implication of much of this coverage is of a burgeoning underclass. The *Sunday Telegraph* focused on the fact that the baby's grandmother was only 26 years old, and that she, 'lives in a council house', and, 'gave birth herself at 14 and now has five children by two men' (Patterson, *Sunday Telegraph*, 29/08/99).

When a second pregnancy to a 12-year-old came to light, this time in Sheffield, the tone of press coverage was even more punitive, particularly as the young woman's 14-year old boyfriend was widely perceived to have a flippant attitude and to be lacking in shame (Brook, *Daily Mail*, 3/09/99; Dennis, *The Mirror*, 3/09/99; *Daily Telegraph* leader, 4/09/99). A leader article in *The Times* described him as 'a 14-year old Artful Dodger... a knowing child-man, somewhere between

Just William and Errol Flynn and blissfully unburdened by conscience' (*The Times*, 4/09/99). This description seems to place the debate in Dickensian Britain, from which discourses of the 'dangerous classes' first emerged. These stories also delineate the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. The young man, in being presented as a 'child-man' who has had 'lovers', is disqualified from the category of child.

Thus, newspaper headlines for this period suggest the corruption of the innocence of (female) children, moral degeneracy and irresponsibility, sexual promiscuity and, again an assumption of ever-rising rates of teenage pregnancy, as indicated by the following headlines:

This is a nightmare: 'I want her to be innocent again', weeps pregnant girl's Mum. (Dennis, *The Mirror*, 2/09/99)

Let's talk about sex: So who's to blame for soaring rates of teenage pregnancy? Feckless teenagers? Or the schools they attend? (Stuart, *The Independent*, 8/09/99)

The denunciation of the 'underclass' reached a peak in an article in the *Daily Mail* on 8 September, in which Lynda Lee Potter stated that teenage pregnancies occur,

because often their mothers are idle sluts who aren't fit to look after a dog, let alone a child... It's not a poverty trap but a commitment deficiency on the part of their jobless parents, who put their own appetites before their children's welfare. They're experts at extracting every penny of social security they can get, and their homes don't lack the material things in life. They have cars and videos and enough money to drink themselves senseless in the pub. (Lee Potter, *Daily Mail*, 8/09/99)

Lee Potter's description is replete with images of a 'feckless underclass'. Of course, this is only one view, with which readers will not necessarily agree. Nonetheless, it is also notable that the condemnation of teenage motherhood in the articles reviewed above includes not only tabloids such as *The People*, *The*

Mirror and *The Mail*, but broadsheets such as *The Times*, the *Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Thus, although McRobbie (1994b) argues that the newspaper media do not act in a monolithic manner, in this case, the discursive formation of teenage motherhood appears to be tightly delineated across the newspaper media.

The next stage of the moral panic involved the ‘manning of the barricades’ by ‘editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people’ (Cohen 1972: 9), and the intervention of the Prime Minister on 5 September followed by comments by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Interviewed by *The Observer* newspaper, Blair responded to the pregnancies of the two 12-year old girls by stating:

We need to find a new sense of national moral purpose for this new generation. People want to live in a society that is without prejudice but is with rules. Government can play its part, but parents have to play their part. (Blair, cited in Rawnsley, *The Observer*, 5/09/99).

The then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, also asserted at this point that councils should make more use of curfew orders for young people. Blair followed this three days later with a feature article in *The Times* entitled, ‘Teenage mums are all our business’. In this piece, he directly addressed readers on the issue of teenage pregnancy, stating that the issue of teenage pregnancy ‘is indicative of a way of life that harms them and their children’ (Blair, 1999a). He also linked the issue to ‘deep family instability’ and ‘endemic crime and drug abuse’:

It is simply not acceptable for young children to be left without supervision, parental or otherwise, free to truant, vandalise and roam the streets at all hours. And it is morally wrong for us to stand by aside and be indifferent to it... I believe now that it is the decent majority, who play by the rules, who want us to take a lead in defining a new moral purpose (Blair 1999a).

The implication of this seems to be that teenage mothers are *of necessity* from such 'morally deficient' backgrounds, and that they are young people beyond control. Blair seems to be defining pregnant young women and their families as morally 'other' and as an underclass. This is underlined by his statement in the same article that, 'life on benefit is not an option', and by the positioning of teenage mothers as outside of the decent majority.

On 23 September a third pregnancy to a 12-year old was reported, in Torbay, again resulting in considerable coverage. In all, 62 newspaper items relating to teenage pregnancy were found for the month of September; more than for the previous four months combined. Later in October newspaper coverage of the issue of teenage pregnancy died down and the peak in this particular phase of the ongoing social anxiety over the issue was at an end.

What had been firmly established during this period was the apparent 'fact' that teenage pregnancies had reached epidemic proportions. For example, a report in *The Independent* quite incorrectly stated that the SEU Report 'details how the pregnancy rate among young women has shot up in the past 20 years to be the highest in Western Europe' (Sylvester, *The Independent*, 13/06/99). Only two articles during this six-month period mentioned that teenage pregnancy rates had not increased for twenty years (Lalani, *The Mirror*, 2/09/99; Norton, *The Independent*, 23/09/99) and one solitary article in the *Daily Telegraph* stated that births to young women under 16 were extremely rare (Bristow, *Daily Telegraph*, 16/10/99). Finally, only one article, in a column by Natasha Walter, argued for a structural explanation for teenage pregnancy, rather than succumbing to

individualistic arguments about an amoral underclass:

Rather than being outraged at children's behaviour, maybe politicians and the press should start to feel outraged at the way our society treats disadvantaged families... If we listen to what children themselves are saying, we can hear that they are urgently asking for action. But their voices are often drowned out by a deluge of moral pontification. (Walter, *The Independent*, 6/09/99)

This article is unique in this period in presenting a youth-centred approach to the issues of youth, sexuality and teenage parenthood. It is also unique in suggesting that disadvantaged young people should be listened to, instead of being made the subjects of ever-greater social control.

DECONSTRUCTING HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES

The construction of childhood as a time of innocence and extreme dependency (Burman 1994; Morss 1996) has specific implications for discourses of mothers and of young people. Mothers are only mothers in relation to their children, and 'adolescents' are only adolescents in relation to their ambiguous position between childhood and adulthood. Teenage motherhood lies at the point of intersection of these three sets of discourses, which also form part of wider discourses of the family.

Discourses of youth

The social meanings that are attached to youthful bodies and to the activities of youth more widely are socially and historically specific. Adolescence is a social construction that developed during the early twentieth century (Griffin 1993a). G. Stanley Hall (1904) was amongst the first to consider 'adolescence' as a specific developmental stage. He characterised it as a time of 'storm and stress', during

which young people required both freedom in order to discover their potential, and control in order to establish order, inculcate self-discipline, and suppress sexual impulses (Griffin 1993a).

This view of youth has formed a template for later models. Within mainstream developmental psychology, 'adolescence' is often conceptualised as a key set of stages of biological, cognitive and identity development, marked by crisis (Erikson 1968). However, this model can be criticised for conceptualising youth as a time of *becoming*, or a process, rather than of being (Frankenberg 1993, cited in Brannen 1996). It can also be criticised for representing adolescent development as having a number of fixed and inviolable stages (Burman 1994; Morss 1996). These can become both prescriptive and normative, with the potential to exclude the needs and experiences of individual young people as well as diversity between different groups of 'youth' (Flanagan 1998).

The prolongation of adolescence is a particularly pertinent feature of advanced industrialised societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Cote and Allahar 1996). Opportunities to enter the labour market have drastically diminished. The transition to adulthood therefore appears to last longer, independent housing is more difficult to find, social security benefits and wages are lower, and there are new psychological issues to be resolved (Coleman 1999). This also means that young people who engage in 'adult' behaviour (including sex and parenthood) are castigated for doing so, and that those who become parents are seen as more of an economic and social burden than in previous eras (Family Policy Studies Centre 1999).

Many authors have drawn attention to the increasing surveillance of young people in recent years (e.g. Hebdige 1988; Griffin 1993a; Scraton 1997). As Hebdige (1983) states, 'in societies such as ours, youth is present only when its presence is a problem, or rather when its presence is *regarded* as a problem' (402). The period from the 1980s onwards has been characterised by an increasingly punitive moral climate towards young people (Davies 1986; Scraton 1997). Working-class youth bore the brunt of New Right ideology in the 1980s, suffering particularly high rises in unemployment, the lowering of social security benefit levels, and the replacement of jobs with training schemes (Coles 1995; Maguire and Maguire 1996). However, this is not only a feature of the New Right, but of late twentieth century Britain more generally. Nor is it specific to Britain, since young people are one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the US, Canada, Japan, Scandinavia and across Western Europe (Cote and Allahar 1995).

The regulation of 'dangerous' youth has special resonance for young people in care, who are the subjects of particularly close surveillance. Though only a small minority of children and young people in care have been in trouble with the law prior to the imposition of a Care Order (Carlen 1988), it is often wrongly assumed that they enter care because of 'problem behaviours' and criminality. In February 1993, for example, the then Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke stated, 'it is no good [social workers] mouthing political rhetoric, as some of them do, about why children in their care are so delinquent' (*The Guardian*, 22/02/93). This view is experienced as widespread by the CLA, who state that, 'those who have been in care are expected to have experienced a childhood of criminal activity' (2001).

Surveillance of young people also takes strongly gendered forms. Girls and young women are subjected to greater social control than are boys and young men, across both private and public spheres (Cain 1989; Lees 1997). Discourses of youth that frequently either criminalise or sexualise young people have a particular dynamic in relation to young women, who are 'policed' by discourses of femininity that view them as in need of both protection and control (Cain 1989). Furthermore, there are contradictions between discourses of adolescence and of femininity, since adolescence tends to be associated with action, unruliness and masculinity, whilst femininity is often associated with passivity and sexuality (Hudson 1984; Cohen 1997). Contradictions may occur when the behaviour of young women is defined either as being that of 'normal adolescents', or as 'maladjustment to femininity' (Hudson 1984). This places powerful constraints upon girls to 'grow up good' (Cain 1989). At the same time, discourses of adolescence tend to be subversive of those of femininity, so that girls' attempts to be accepted as young women who inhabit the adult world are always liable to be undermined by perceptions of them as immature (Hudson 1984). The surveillance of young women is particularly intense in the case of certain groups, notably working-class and black young women (Griffin 1992; Smart 1996; Young 1996).

Again, these arguments have particular resonance for young women in care. Once in care, girls are outside the family, which acts as a key site of gender control:

Girls in care (by definition beyond family control in at least the physical and sometimes also in the disciplinary sense) are often seen as being gender decontrolled. Already seen, therefore, as being *unregulated women*, they are also seen as being potential recidivist law-breakers. Their 'files' become 'records' and the authorities act accordingly. (Carlen 1988: 80, original italics)

As a result of these processes, young women in care may be less subject to the kinds of informal familial controls that induce conformity. Instead, to grow up in care is to be, 'reared and regulated [...] as female public property' (Carlen 1988: 90). Carlen provides an analysis which sees the surveillance of young people in care as the outcome of the intertwining of class, 'race' and gender, with a 'complex but malign influence' on the type and extent of control of young women (Carlen 1988: 74). Whilst Carlen's study focuses primarily on young women in custody, aspects of her analysis are applicable to young women who are in a more ambiguous position in relation to non-conformity, in becoming young single mothers, as we shall see in later chapters.

Discourses of motherhood

Motherhood can be conceptualised as primarily an institution, rather than a natural condition (Smart 1996), and the meanings attached to mothering as a practice have also been constructed in socially and historically variable ways. Mothering gives rise to cultural anxieties which are managed by defences, most markedly a splitting of mothers into idealised or denigrated in the cultural psyche (Featherstone 1997:1). Cultural fears of the extent of child abuse and neglect can only be contained if the cause of maltreatment is located in particular social groups who can be identified as 'other'. This allows us to believe that abuse and neglect are predictable and containable, and that they are restricted to particular (deprived) social groups. According to Smart (1996), the management of mothering leads to the policing of the boundaries of normative motherhood, through psychological, welfare and moral/legal discourses. The latter two have been present in differing forms from the 1900s, whilst psychological discourses

really began to take on a key role from the 1940s onwards.

Contemporary constructions of motherhood have their origins in the discourse of the bourgeois family, in which domesticity formed a central component from the eighteenth century onwards (Badinter 1981; Davidoff 1999). This familial discourse imposed a universality and apparent unity on structures of production, reproduction, sexuality and socialisation (Mitchell 1971). Consequently, a mother's love for her children and her associated self-sacrifice gradually became viewed as natural and instinctive. As Badinter argues, by the late eighteenth century, '[n]ot to love one's child had become an inexplicable crime. A mother was loving – or she was not a real mother' (1981: 178).

During the twentieth century, this view of mothering as unproblematic, instinctual and rewarding was taken up and further developed within medical and psychological discourses. The ever-present mother has also come to be seen as crucial to the healthy psychological development of children. Psychological theories of attachment and bonding of infants with their mothers (Winnicott 1965; Bowlby 1973) provided further ammunition for those who wished to argue that children required their mothers to be constantly available to them, and that children whose mothers (rather than other carers) could not do this would suffer psychological damage.

Since the 1970s, feminists have criticised such models of mothering for confusing socially specific prescriptions (such as childcare being an exclusively female task) with biology (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Ireland 1993; Letherby 1994; Miller

2000). For many women, the status of mother overrides other aspects of identity, so that they are seen by others and by themselves exclusively in relation to their mothering. As the status of 'mother' subsumes other aspects of identity, and since mothers are held responsible for the healthy development and socialisation of their children, this creates a situation in which the status of 'mother' can legitimate judgement or scrutiny of any aspect of a woman's life or behaviour.

Such criticisms do not mean that theories of attachment need to be rejected in their entirety. The care received by children in their early years has a lasting impact. Nor is it to say that children's dependency needs are *purely* a cultural construct. It is insufficient simply to criticise traditional developmental and psychodynamic theories for oppressing women and for taking inadequate account of social forces, as some feminist texts of the 1970s (such as Millett 1970) could be accused of doing. It is also necessary to address the issue of how all parents, in whatever emotional and material circumstances, can provide adequate care for their children, and to acknowledge the impact of early experiences on later development (Featherstone 1997). Children's needs are not always the same as those of their mothers, and professional intervention may be necessary in certain cases to safeguard the needs of the child.

Nevertheless, the problem with traditional psychological theories lies in the way in which they have been taken as evidence of the need for mothers to be constantly available to their children, and with their translation into normative prescriptions in popular childcare manuals (Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Glenn et al. 1994). It is the specific way in which the mother-child dyad is conceptualised

in western societies that is culturally constructed. The ideal of the 'good mother', as represented in popular, medical and psychological discourse, is so difficult for any woman consistently to achieve that women are seemingly set up to fail. As Garcia Coll et al. assert, 'no mother can *always* be a good mother by her own or others' standards' (1988: 7). Feminists have argued that the image of this 'ideal' of the mother has the effect of blaming mothers both for their own problems and for those of their children (Boulton 1983; Richardson 1993). It is also argued that the social context of mothering is frequently inadequately acknowledged in both popular and scientific discourse. This also means that women who express dissatisfaction or distress may be viewed as maladjusted to their feminine role (Boulton 1983; Barclay et al. 1997; Miller 2000). Not being classified as a 'good' mother also has severe consequences, as the flip-side of the idealisation of motherhood is the denigration of those who fail to meet such standards and their labelling as 'bad' mothers. In severe cases, such women may be excluded from the category of 'mother' (Goode 1999).

However, it is not only a matter of which individual women can live up to this ideal, but of *who* is seen as constituting a suitable mother. The feminist argument that mothers are set up to fail in the face of the 'ideal' of mothering (Miller 2000) also requires some reconfiguration in the case of mothers who are labelled as deviant, as has been pointed out in explorations of diverse forms of mothering (e.g. Phoenix et al. 1991; Garcia Coll et al. 1998). Current dominant conceptions of mothering in advanced industrial nations are based on white, heterosexual, middle-class norms (Garcia Coll et al. 1998; Goode 1999). As Woollett and Marshall note, 'motherhood is construed as problematic for those women who do

not bring up children in the 'right' circumstances at the 'right' time' (2000:313). Women who are living on welfare, divorced or unmarried, aged under 20, lesbian, drug-users, or who have committed criminal offences are all marginalised within the category of 'good mother' and are likely to experience particularly severe sanctions if they are deemed to be failing (Garcia Coll et al. 1998; Goode 1999).

Discourses of 'teenage motherhood'

Concerns over teenage mothers draw on these hegemonic constructions of motherhood, youth and girlhood. The issue of 'teenage pregnancy' is located at the centre of a constellation of fears and uncertainties over the changing social and moral order. Panics over the family during the 1980s centred upon 'the fear that the transition to 'normal (hetero)sexuality and the nuclear family for young people had been disrupted to an irrevocable extent' (Griffin 1993a: 162). Widespread social anxieties exist currently over: dependence on the state; the perceived breakdown of the nuclear family and the rise of lone parent families; the upbringing of the next generation and perceived cycles of both poverty and delinquency; the perceived disappearance of childhood innocence; female sexuality; and finally, changing gender roles (Roseneil and Mann 1996; Scraton 1997; Griffin 1993a; Gittins 1998; Luker 1996). Young mothers have been constructed as a burgeoning underclass of 'threatening youth' from the 'dangerous classes' (Davies 1986) who represent a cost, both moral and economic, to society.

While young men are seen as being in need of social control due to their 'natural' tendency to behave in 'delinquent' ways, girls are defined in terms of their

sexuality, which is viewed as dangerous and in need of social control (Cain 1989; Hudson 1983, 1989). Annie Hudson asserts that, underlying British welfare practice is 'an almost psychic fear of a predatory female sexuality' (Hudson 1989: 197). Within this context, teenage pregnancy can be seen as providing direct evidence of female sexuality and, therefore, a social threat. There is still an abundance of rules and regulations marking off sex as the sole preserve of adults, and transgression of these rules may disqualify a young person from the category of 'child' (Gittins 1998). Therefore, the construction of pregnancy and motherhood amongst young women as a major source of moral approbation places powerful discursive controls upon their actions.

Anxieties around teenage pregnancy are created by the intersection of the two discordant discourses of adolescence and reproduction³. As Murcott (1980) notes, teenage pregnancy 'is a contradiction in terms and carries overtones of a nineteenth century horror of precocity' (7). Teenage pregnancy functions as a form of 'social pollution' (Douglas 1966; Murcott 1980) and, as such, constitutes a threat to our sense of order. When young parents act in ways considered to be 'adolescent', they go against social expectations of how mothers should behave so their problematic status as 'adolescent' overrides that of 'mother'. Consequently, 'they are labelled a "problem", rather than a person who needs support in her own growth... but these needs do not automatically make them bad parents' (Flanagan 1998: 247-8).

³ Similar arguments are made in relation to conflicting discourses of adolescence and femininity. See page 63 above.

The meanings and practices around motherhood below the age of 21 vary socially and historically, as do the meanings of motherhood and of youth. Prior to the 1970s, pregnant young women were confined to mother and baby homes and babies were commonly adopted. However, this practice decreased dramatically in the early 1970s (Selman 1976) due to a range of factors, including the availability of the pill, changes in the law on abortion in 1967 and a substantial decrease in adoptions (Kiernan et al. 1998). By the mid-1970s, young lone mothers were more likely either to choose abortion or to raise their own children. The 1970s can be seen as a decade in which ‘the boundaries between good and bad motherhood were most blurred... and motherhood began (...) to escape the normative constraints of psychological and moral orthodoxy’ (Smart 1996).

However, this was not to last and, during the 1980s, young single mothers became a key symbol of immorality. In New Right rhetoric, they formed a central feature of the ‘dependency culture’ considered to characterise the ‘underclass’. New Right thinkers (e.g. Gilder 1981; Murray 1990, 1996) argued that the problem could be attributed to permissiveness in the sexual culture and parenting of the 1960s. The rise in early lone motherhood was believed to be undermining the paternal role and causing juvenile delinquency, as young men turned to violence without the steadying influence of the family. Without marriage, delinquents would grow up into fully-fledged criminals, as marriage for men constitutes, ‘an indispensable civilising force’ (Murray 1990: 23). The outcome of these processes, according to the New Right, was a self-perpetuating underclass whose members have a different set of values, which can be likened to the ‘dishonest poor’ described by Mayhew in the nineteenth century (Murray 1990).

Echoes of these attitudes can be seen in the political pronouncements of members of the Labour Government of the late 1990s, as we have seen. Young mothers still appear to be a prime scapegoat for social ills. Indeed, Roseneil and Mann (1996) argue that the problematisation of lone motherhood can be seen as part of an anti-feminist backlash. However, it appears that it has become less acceptable to stigmatise lone mothers *per se*, because of the increasing proportion of households headed by a lone mother of all ages and classes (McRobbie 1994a). At the same time, the focus for such stigmatisation seems to have shifted to mothers below the age of 21, and has arguably intensified.

Debates over 'teenage mothers' have perhaps not been overtly racialised in this country to the extent that they have in the United States (Phoenix 1992). Nevertheless, there are frequent undertones of fears around the sexuality of black and ethnic minority young women, and of an increasing proportion of the British population being from black or minority ethnic families (Phoenix 1991a, 1992; Griffin 1992; Lubiano 1993). It is perhaps no coincidence that a recent moral panic, following on from that over 'teenage mothers', concerned predictions that the white population of Leicester would soon be in the minority (*The Guardian*, 01/01/01), and by moral panics over asylum seekers. Thus, 'race' can be said to constitute a 'silent discourse' in relation to teenage mothers in Britain (Phoenix 1992). Indeed, Phoenix (1991b) argues that the absence from public debate of the issue of teenage pregnancy amongst black young women may reveal the extent to which lone motherhood is the expected cultural norm for black women, whilst it has been viewed as pathological for white women.

INSIDER ACCOUNTS OF MOTHERHOOD AND EARLY MOTHERHOOD

The policing of the behaviour of working-class young women has implications for how they view themselves. Working-class young women live their lives being judged by the middle classes, and may consequently measure themselves against these judgements, in a form of self-surveillance (Skeggs 1997). As Skeggs argues,

Categories of class operate not only as an organizing principle which enable access to and limitations on social movement and interaction but are also reproduced at the intimate level as a 'structure of feeling' (cf. Williams, 1961, 1977) in which doubt, anxiety and fear inform the production of subjectivity. To be working-classed, Kuhn (1995) argues, generates a constant fear of never having 'got it right'. (Skeggs 1997: 7)

However, a view of young working-class women as simply 'positioned' at the margins would be deterministic, and would present a picture of young women as passive victims of social forces. Whilst recognising the ways in which the young women's lives are circumscribed, we need to ask how they act within these constraints. Do they, as Skeggs (1997) argues, comply in 'self-surveillance'? If not, how do they struggle against and/or resist such constraints? Are these forms of resistance useful, or are they (self)-destructive? These questions require a dynamic model of power, exploring how the facts of social difference are turned into subjectivity and self-understanding (Hey 2000). An important aspect of this research, then, is an exploration of how young women interpret their own lives, and of their actions, reactions, and interactions.

Very few previous studies have focused upon 'insider accounts' of teenage motherhood. There has been an historical tendency in research and in policy debates for young people to make a relatively marginal contribution (Alderson 1995; James and Prout 1997; James et al. 1998). Young men became the focus of

subcultural theory in the 1960s and 1970s but fewer studies have been conducted with young women (Griffin 1997b; although see McRobbie and Garber 1975; McRobbie and Nava 1984; Griffin 1985 for early exceptions). This criticism may also be made about other groups of young people, including black youth, young people with disabilities, gay, lesbian and bisexual young people (Griffin 1997b). This study, then, attempts to employ a youth-centred perspective, arguing that young people's perspectives are valid and worthy of note.

It is also the case that, until recently, the mother as a subject in her own right had been rarely considered by researchers (Kaplan 1992; Read 2000). A key reason for this is that motherhood has been so naturalised that the difficulties it presents have been neglected. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that feminist authors began to redress this, through a number of notable studies based on listening to women's own accounts (Oakley 1979, 1980; Graham 1980; Boulton 1983; Ribbens 1994; McMahon 1995). They highlighted the physical and emotional labour involved in mothering, and presented motherhood as both pain and pleasure. There have also been a number of autobiographical accounts of motherhood and mothering (Gieve 1989; Morris 1992), and accounts of the transition to motherhood from the perspectives of mothers (Boulton 1983; O'Connor 1993; Barclay et al. 1997; Bailey 1999; Miller 2000). These often highlight the contrast between the views of mothers and the reality of their daily lives, and the views of the experts and of idealized commentaries on mothering such as those found in many childcare manuals (Woollett and Phoenix 1991). For example, single mothers often assert that they manage well under difficult circumstances by drawing on a range of forms of support (Woollett and Marshall

2000). Studies based on women's own perspectives have also argued that women are active agents in creating safe space to care for their children (Read 2000) and that they demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity (Kaplan 1992; Garcia Coll et al. 1998; Read 2000).

The few studies that exist of the transition to motherhood suggest that women's own stories of this process frequently do not fit with publicly available narratives (Miller 1998; 2000). Although motherhood is often portrayed within dominant discourses as being natural, joyful, rewarding, and a biological given, the transition to motherhood is often a difficult process, which may be traumatic and distressing for first-time mothers of all ages⁴. Women's narratives may involve, at times, struggle, crisis points and ruptures, as well as continuity (Miller 2000). Indeed, Barclay et al. (1997) argue that the changes brought about by first-time motherhood amount to more than a transition, as 'mothers undergo a profound reconstruction of self' (72). They describe the process as consisting of six key components: (i) 'realising', in which the reality of being a mother sinks in; (ii) being 'drained' by the demands of the new-born baby; (iii) feeling 'alone' and unsupported; (iv) experiencing a sense of 'loss'; (v) feeling 'unready'; and finally (vi) 'working it out', where women develop new skills and confidence. Women's accounts of mothering itself are also often characterised by ambivalence and disruption, as well as happiness and fulfilment. Boulton (1983) found that around half of the fifty mothers questioned found childcare predominantly frustrating and irritating, and that middle-class mothers were more likely than working-class women to be unfulfilled and frustrated by motherhood.

⁴ The women in the study by Barclay et al. 1997 had a mean age of 30.5 years. In the study by Miller (2000), all but one of the women were in their late twenties and early thirties.

Miller (2000) argues that women talk about pregnancy and motherhood drawing upon three different discursive repertoires: a 'public narrative' of motherhood, that conforms to the medicalised model of 'becoming a mother'; a 'private narrative' based on lay narratives of mothering; and a 'personal narrative' of pregnancy and motherhood, that can often contradict both public and private accounts and thus cannot easily be voiced within established discursive repertoires. The key reason for the difficulties in voicing such 'personal narratives', Miller asserts, lies in the fact that these are stories of loss and ambivalence. This dichotomy between public discourses of motherhood and women's own accounts has serious implications for some women, as those who are open about difficulties or ambivalence may lay themselves open to moral sanctions (Miller 2000) and to pathologisation by health and social care professionals. It may therefore be difficult for women (of any age) to admit to difficulties, for fear of being viewed as inadequate mothers. However, such an admission has even more serious implications for women whose membership of particular social groups means that they are already problematised mothers.

This highlights the need to listen to women from diverse backgrounds, whose experience of motherhood and mothering may vary considerably from the white middle-class 'norm' as portrayed in childcare manuals. The diverse experiences and views of motherhood amongst black women, working-class women and lone mothers, for example, are often marginalised from public debate. Groups who are constructed as deviant are more likely to be the focus of psychological and policy studies (hence the large number of studies of the causes and outcomes of teenage motherhood seen in Chapter One). However, the voices of women from such

marginalised groups themselves are frequently conspicuous by their absence, because to label someone deviant is to undermine the credibility of their account and of their experience.

Against the trend, some authors have focussed particularly on the experience of motherhood amongst women from marginalised groups (Garcia Coll et al. 1998). Such studies have included those based on the voices of black women (Glenn et al. 1994; Sparks 1998), and mothers who are living in poverty (Graham 1982, 1993; Blackburn 1991), older (Berryman 1991), lone parents (Shnitzer 1998), incarcerated (Garcia Coll et al. 1998) and drug-users (Goode 1999).

Despite a surge in interest amongst feminists in the accounts of mothers 'on the margins' during the 1990s, young women's accounts of becoming mothers are still relatively scarce. Those that exist (Phoenix 1991a,b; Schofield 1994; Flanagan 1998; Allen and Bourke Dowling 1999; Davies et al. 2001; Kirkman et al. 2001) suggest that it may not always be the social problem it is assumed to be. Young women frequently view their own experience of motherhood in a different light from that depicted in popular and academic discourses. Indeed, they may see motherhood as an opportunity and an achievement, as well as a challenge (Simms and Smith 1985; Phoenix 1991a; Kirkman et al. 2001; Davies et al. 2001).

Phoenix (1991a,b) found that, whilst there was some common ground between insider accounts and those of outsiders (including professionals), there were also disparities. She also found that young mothers chose different themes or discourses to draw upon, depending upon their circumstances. These discourses

varied between individuals, and sometimes within individual accounts. The young women did not simply accept dominant social values around motherhood, age and marriage. Rather, they chose to distance themselves from the negative associations of early motherhood and to highlight structural constraints on their position (Phoenix 1991b). Almost all of those in Phoenix's study (1991a) had positive views of themselves as mothers.

Phoenix's findings have been supported by recent studies of teenage motherhood in both Australia (Kirkman et al. 2001) and Canada (Davies et al. 2001). Kirkman et al (2001) found that, in contrast to their positioning in canonical narratives as irresponsible and unprepared, young women create narratives in which they perform the role of good mothers who are able to learn the skills required for motherhood. Davies et al (2001) similarly found that young women often welcomed their pregnancies rather than viewing them as a mistake. They were 'actively engaged in negotiations with boyfriends, fathers of their children, their own families, and their boyfriends' families to create support structures for themselves and their children' (Davies et al. 2001: 97). As these authors point out, young women make decisions around the creation of their family on relatively uncharted territory, on which traditional assumptions regarding work, sexuality and the family are shifting and being renegotiated, socially and individually. It is only by eliciting young women's accounts of how they negotiate this territory as active agents that we can fully understand their choices and respond appropriately.

CONCLUSION

Academic and popular discourses around teenage pregnancy and motherhood, as described in the preceding two chapters, provide a depressing picture of the lives of young mothers, in terms both of their ability to escape poverty and to resist oppressive discourses. Young mothers are viewed as a problem, rather than as *having* problems which are frequently not of their own making (Phoenix 1991a; Selman and Glendinning 1994; Luker 1996). This has led to a situation in which questions over support for young mothers are sometimes neglected (Selman and Glendinning 1994).

This chapter has explored the ways in which young mothers are represented in popular discourses, through an engagement with the critical literature on motherhood and youth, and through analysis of recent media coverage of the issue of teenage pregnancy/motherhood. It has been argued that young mothers are the focus of considerable cultural anxiety, surveillance and condemnation. Popular discourses represent young mothers as irresponsible, economically dependent, work-shy and promiscuous. Young women's own accounts of motherhood and mothering are rarely considered, partly because their positioning as deviant means that their stories are likely to lack credibility. However, there is a small but significant body of literature focusing on young women's stories of motherhood and on the wider discourses that young women draw upon in constructing their accounts. Such studies suggest that young women who become mothers view mothering as challenging, but also see it as having positive aspects and as an achievement.

Chapter Three

Interpretivism and the Research Process

*The language [people] use and the connections they make
reveal the world that they see and in which they act.
(Gilligan et al. 1990: 2)*

The reasons for using qualitative interviews and an interpretive method of analysis are multiple, but relate to a fit between an interpretivist epistemology, qualitative methods of enquiry, and an emancipatory politics. Whilst these elements are by no means coterminous, a relationship exists between them in that they allow for a critical approach to the idea of value-free social research and to dominant assumptions about marginalised social groups. The first section of this chapter briefly considers these reasons for the use of qualitative methods within a post-positivist epistemology, set in the context of the study of life transitions.

The second section focuses on the process of setting up the research, including issues and dilemmas in conducting research within an organisation. Careful consideration was given to ethical issues due to the particular needs of the participants as excluded and potentially vulnerable young people. In the third section the rationale and process of the fieldwork is described. Reasons for the use of interviewing are given, and more specifically for both group and individual interviews. In total, five group interviews and twenty-eight semi-structured interviews with individual young mothers / couples¹ were conducted, in six different locations across England. Characteristics are provided of the sample, and methods of sampling and of interviewing are outlined.

¹ Two interviews also involved young fathers.

In the final section, the post-fieldwork stage is described, focusing primarily on the mode of analysis. It is argued that material from both individual and group interviews can be used to explore the meanings of early motherhood for the young women, and to examine their construction of accounts in ways that resist discourses of themselves as inadequate mothers. In summary, it is suggested that interpretive methods provide a key means of highlighting the day-to-day experiences and discourses of marginalised young women, in ways that can account for multiple sites of subordination.

AN INTERPRETIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY

The focus on meaning and its production is central to several theoretical traditions, including feminism, phenomenology and post-structuralism. Each of these traditions holds that researchers cannot directly present either the voices of participants, nor their direct experiences. Neither can the researcher gain access to a fixed account of lives since she cannot stand outside of the research process but is a part of the social world she seeks to study (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Kvale 1996; Silverman 1997; Ribbens and Edwards 1998). Consequently, those engaged in social research need to acknowledge that *all* research contains 'bias', but that the impact of the researcher and their own subjective understandings are rarely acknowledged other than in qualitative studies (Kidder and Fine 1997).

The ways in which a story is told in a research interview are mediated by the social and interactional context within which it is situated. In all research there are points of representation at which the researched, the researcher, and the research audience make interpretative decisions. The ways in which young women narrate

their experiences are inevitably mediated by biography, by a process of conscious and unconscious selection, by interpersonal dynamics of the interview and by the discursive resources available to participants. Furthermore, we cannot 'give voice' to our research participants because there will always be a range of experiences and meanings represented in a study (Riessman 1993). This is particularly the case here, as the participants are positioned at the interface of a number of different forms of oppression. Consequently, whilst this study seeks to explore young women's stories of becoming mothers, it also aims to take account of how these accounts are constructed, rather than viewing them as providing unmediated access to their lives as they are lived.

There are also compelling political and ethical reasons for the employment of qualitative methods. 'Objective' research involves an accommodation to dominant values, by failing to question taken-for-granted assumptions about the social order (Parker and Shotter 1990; Humphries and Truman 1994; I. Parker 1997). Qualitative methods may be preferred in researching the lives of oppressed and marginalised groups, including children and young people (Corsaro 1997; James and Prout 1997; James et al. 1998), to avoid the production of data that pathologise participants (Edwards 1993). Crucially, qualitative interviewing methods may be more able to provide participants with a shared role in shaping the categories and concepts that define the research.

Accounts of life transitions

This study includes an exploration of how young women talk about their lives and life transitions. In doing so, I draw on the 'youth cultures', rather than the 'youth

transitions' tradition in youth studies (MacDonald et al. 2001), as young people's subjective experiences are often under-represented in the latter:

The most damaging problem with the 'transitions debate' is that it has tended to take young people out of the youth equation... treat[ing] young people as troubled victims of economic and social restructuring without enough recourse to the active ways in which young people negotiate such circumstances in the course of their everyday lives. (Miles 2000:10)

Therefore, whilst the term 'transition' is employed here, it is used in a way that seeks to recognise that young women negotiate change in complex and varied ways. The school-to-work transition, whilst featuring in the lives of the participants, is only one such transition, and has varying levels of importance for individual young women. Others, including family and housing transitions, may be equally or more important (Coles 1995) and all are interrelated. Thus, the following chapters attempt to place these 'transitions' in the context of the young women's biographies. This involves both looking back to their lives before, and also looking 'forwards', past these standard 'youth transition' points, to the current lives of young women who are now mothers.

In talking about choices made over time, constraints on action, as well as opportunities may be evident. This is partly apparent in the ways that people tell of events that shape their lives, but it is also important to consider the ways in which people tell their stories, as this can allow us to explore how people construct personal and social identities. The telling of personal narratives can reveal the workings of power in everyday practices and institutional forms (Personal Narratives Group 1989). However, some stories are much more likely both to frame the agenda and to receive an audience, whilst the voices of those on the

periphery, who lack both power and resources, are silenced. This was certainly the case for the participants, who, whilst often the focus of considerable professional intervention, appear to have rarely had the opportunity to tell their stories, nor to speak of the significance of life transitions for them.

THE PRE-FIELDWORK PHASE: ETHICS AND ACCESS

Methods have been employed which aim to facilitate the process by which the perspectives of marginalised young women can enter into the debate over 'teenage motherhood'. Ethics can be seen as forming a key part of this, and are inseparable from power relations and the resultant vulnerability of some social groups (May 1997; Sieber 1993).

Relevant ethical issues can be broken down into three broad inter-related areas or levels of sensitivity: the interview content, which concerns the 'private' domain; interactional features of the interviews themselves, including unequal power relations; and the political sensitivity of discourses around 'teenage mothers' and working-class 'youth'. The sensitive nature of a research topic is 'emergent', lying in 'the relationship between the topic and the social context within which the research is conducted' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 5). In the present research, an ethically sensitive position involves recognition of the potential vulnerability, stigmatisation and social scrutiny faced by many of the young women, and a minimum requirement of the research is that the researcher should seek not to compound this stigmatisation.

Whilst the notion of a 'private sphere' may be socially constructed (Edwards

1993), investigations into pregnancy, motherhood, sexual relationships and the family are likely to be experienced as personal and private by participants (Renzetti and Lee 1993). Investigation into the private sphere makes research participants potentially vulnerable to emotional distress, particularly when they are care leavers, who are likely to have experienced past trauma. A further aspect to this potential vulnerability relates to the potential for disclosures which suggest that the participant, her child or another person is at risk of serious harm. The researcher therefore has an ethical obligation to be clear about the limits to confidentiality. This issue is heightened in research involving participants who are still legally considered to be minors and who also have young children.

Participants are also vulnerable to the judgement of their private lives by others, as a result of their relative powerlessness. Power relations are inherent in the relationship of researcher and researched, and also result from the socially ascribed characteristics of both parties (Bhavnani 1990). While there is likely to be a rapport based on shared gender in feminist research (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984), there is a danger in overstating this trust between women. As a white, middle-class researcher, I was aware of difference between myself and participants in terms of age and class, and due to the fact that I do not have children. In some cases difference was compounded by participants' experience of the care system and by ethnicity. The potential for rapport and trust based on gender was, then, to some extent crosscut by these aspects.

Research can potentially constitute a form of public surveillance, and many of the participants had already had aspects of their lives opened up to professional

enquiry and documentation as a result of being in care. Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, the topic of teenage pregnancy frequently featured on the agenda of media and political discourse during the time of the fieldwork. The participants were well aware of the stigma they faced whether as young mothers, care leavers, or both². Therefore, they needed a sense that they could trust, as far as possible, that the research was not going to pathologise or misrepresent them. However, these difficulties do not provide sufficient reason to avoid a sensitive topic, as to do so is to leave the discursive territory to be dominated by conservative discourse and the relevant experiences unheard.

An ethical protocol

Considerable thought was given to the construction of an ethical protocol for this study and to both the 'briefing' and 'de-briefing' processes. Prior to the interview, potential participants were provided with information about the research through the distribution of a leaflet³. Having ascertained from project workers whether any of the participants had literacy problems, a research agreement was provided on the day of the interview⁴. At this point, the reasons for conducting the research were briefly explained to the participants. They were given an indication of the likely length of the interview, but were told that they could stop, take a break, or leave at any time. They were told that the interview was structured around a number of themes, but that there was room for flexibility. I emphasised that they did not have to talk about anything they did not want to, but that I was interested in whatever they had to say and would take their views seriously.

² See Chapters Seven and Eight.

³ See Appendix I, pages 290-1.

⁴ See Appendix II, pages 292-3.

A key part of the research agreement relates to confidentiality, and all names of people and places have been changed in this thesis, in the report written for NCH and in any other papers written as a result of the research. This was explained to participants, and they were told that confidentiality would be assured unless it appeared that they or someone else was at risk of significant harm. If disclosures were made, I would discuss with the participant what the next step to take would be, and whether she wanted to report it. In certain extreme circumstances (for example, a threat to life), I would report it regardless of the wishes of the participant. This protocol was developed in collaboration with NCH child protection staff and is in line with Alderson (1995) and the National Children's Bureau (1993). Having discussed the research agreement, agreement to tape-record the interview was sought. One group and five individuals asked not to be taped⁵ and, in these cases, notes were taken. Consent was sought before the start of the interview but was seen as ongoing, to be re-negotiated as necessary.

De-briefing and positive feedback at the end of interviews were also considered important. Conducting sensitive research requires the recognition of anxiety and pain surrounding aspects of the young women's lives (Edwards 1993). Fortunately, the need to report, or to discuss the reporting of specific incidents, did not arise during fieldwork. In several interviews young women talked about past abuse, and in each case we discussed whether, and how, it had been dealt with. Each case had been discussed in depth with professionals previously, and in most cases had been taken further by the police or social services.

⁵ All five attended the same project, in which the group had decided not to be tape-recorded, because one participant had felt uncomfortable about this. These interviews were used for coding purposes only.

Leaving aside ethical concerns over disclosures of abuse, there is still a risk of the participant being left 'with her emotional life in pieces and no-one to help put them back together' (Edwards 1993: 193). Furthermore, young women's achievements frequently go unacknowledged, and there is the potential for such anxiety and pain to be compounded by insensitive or negative feedback. As well as feedback by the interviewer, wherever possible, project workers were identified who agreed to act as contacts for participants to talk to subsequently. The research information leaflet also provided helpline numbers and my contact details⁶.

Gaining access and setting up interviews

Interviews were conducted between May 1999 and May 2000, and nearly all participants were contacted through projects run by NCH⁷, a national charity for children and young people in need and at risk. In order to familiarise myself with the organisation I visited the central office in London, regional project managers' meetings, and projects. In such a large organisation, access had to be negotiated at several levels, including with regional managers, project managers and project workers. The central Public Policy Unit has a broad overview of the projects, but detailed knowledge of local projects was difficult to obtain. As well as the size of the organisation, part of the difficulty in gaining a foothold was due to the vulnerability of the potential research participants, and to the understandable wishes of 'gatekeepers' to protect them from exploitation. Thus, it took several months to establish a firm foothold within the organisation.

⁶ See page 291.

⁷ Two young mothers were contacted using other sources, in the later stages of interviewing, in order to gain a higher proportion of participants from minority ethnic groups. See page 91.

The projects that served as research sites for group interviews were identified through three strategies: searching an NCH database for suitable projects, attending regional project managers' meetings, and sending written information about the research to all relevant projects, asking for expressions of interest. The five projects selected were all identified as having several young women who were interested in taking part. They also represented a range of provision: three providing services specifically for care leavers, one working with care leavers and young people at risk of homelessness, and one a family centre offering support, advice and childcare to socially disadvantaged families.

There were both disadvantages and advantages of using NCH as a point of access and fieldwork location. The organisation wanted a research report based on a geographical spread of their service-users, so considerable time was spent travelling. This was part of the reason for the use of interviewing rather than observational methods. More importantly, the use of projects as an interview location could have had an impact upon findings. It meant that there were sometimes time constraints on interviews, as projects and crèches work to set hours. Interviews conducted in participants' homes were sometimes (though not always) longer. There may also be questions over whether participants' responses were influenced by the organisational context, and whether they simply told me what they believed NCH would want to hear. The young women could have seen me as linked to NCH and thus to welfare professionals in disadvantageous ways.

However, on balance, I consider the use of these projects to have been more of an advantage than a disadvantage. I described my position to the young women,

telling them a little about what I did and where I usually worked. Participants did criticise NCH staff during interviews, and whilst the young women had some concerns around confidentiality within projects, I spent considerable time going through the meanings and limits to confidentiality with them before the start of interviews. Furthermore, participants were told that interviews could be conducted in projects, at their home or at another venue but nearly all chose the projects.

There also appeared to be advantages in having identifiable links with the charity's Central Office, as this gave the research and me additional credibility. Another advantage relates to the difficulty of researching a marginalised and relatively transient population. The attendance rate for both group and individual interviews was extremely high⁸ and the organisation of some of the interviews was helped considerably by project workers. It may also be significant that many participants had a strong sense of the NCH project being a source of support, so that they were generally trusting of the organisation, its staff and its aims.

THE FIELDWORK PHASE

Sampling and sample characteristics

The participants were all young mothers, but differed from the general population of young mothers in that most had been in care and were living in areas of severe social and economic deprivation (Neighbourhood Statistics 2001). These factors are connected, since care leavers tend to face material disadvantage. All projects

8. Of the 27 young women who took part in group interviews, only one declined to be interviewed individually. A further 4 were not interviewed individually because of having moved away (n=2), being in hospital (n=1) and not turning up on the day (n=1). This very high rate of attendance for interview is in marked contrast with the 6 young women who were contacted directly by the researcher, once contact details had been passed on by NCH staff. 2 out of 6 were not at home at a pre-arranged time, and did not respond to further attempts at contact.

were also based within the top 20 per cent of local authorities for rates of pregnancy amongst 15-17 year olds (SEU 1999). The towns and cities in which the young women lived varied from semi-rural locations to districts of large conurbations.

Sampling for group interviews was based on the selection of the projects, which together were considered likely to provide a sample with a predominance of care leavers and of young women from areas of social deprivation. At the end of the group interview phase, sample characteristics were reviewed using the short questionnaire completed by all participants. Characteristics of those who agreed to be interviewed individually were then analysed in order to assess the balance of care leavers and non-care leavers, along with the range of ages of participants, age and number of their children, and ethnicity. Although the majority of the sample had been in care, the sample also included some young women who had no care history. The reason for this was that discussion with NCH staff revealed that there may not always be a clear division between these two groups. That is, the projects work with young people who are vulnerable on several different levels. Some may not technically be 'care leavers' (that is, they may not have been in care up to the age of 16) but may have spent short periods of time in care. Others can be considered equally vulnerable, but may have managed somehow without entering care. On the other hand, there may be important differences between those who have been in care over a period of time, and those who have not.

Although the group interview sample contained a mixture in terms of care history and age, there were very few participants from minority ethnic groups. According

to their own definition (provided in the questionnaire⁹), three described themselves as Pakistani, and one as mixed 'race'¹⁰. This under-representation is perhaps surprising, given that children and young people from certain minority ethnic groups are over-represented in the care system¹¹ and constitute a sizeable minority of those attending leaving care projects¹². Several projects were also in areas with sizeable populations from minority ethnic groups. In order to achieve a stronger representation of young mothers from minority ethnic groups, a further fourteen NCH projects were contacted, yielding two further participants from one project. At this stage enquiries were made outside of NCH, through voluntary organisations and colleagues, and two more interviews were conducted as a result.

Sample characteristics were collected primarily through a short questionnaire completed by participants at the end of interviews (see Appendix III, pages 294-5, and tables on pages 93-5). In all, thirty-three young women took part in the research, with twenty-two taking part in both stages. Group interviews involved twenty-seven participants, and individual interviews twenty-eight. Five young women took part in a group only, and six in individual interviews only¹³.

None of the young mothers was economically independent at the time of interview. However, there was diversity in terms of age, locality, contact with birth family, lone parenthood or cohabitation, and numbers of children.

⁹See Appendix III, page 294.

¹⁰ This participant did not take part in an individual interview.

¹¹ Specifically, children and young people of African Caribbean origin and those of 'mixed heritage' (Broad 1998).

¹² Broad's (1998) national survey of leaving care projects found that 79 per cent of young people attending were described as white, 13 per cent black, and 3 per cent as Asian.

¹³ In 2 cases this was because the young people in question preferred to be interviewed individually, but did not want to take part in a group. The remaining 4 cases were of young women from ethnic minorities, who were recruited after the group interview stage.

Participants were aged between 15 and 22 at the time of the interview, with a mean age of 18.8 years old. They had become mothers for the first time between the ages of 14 and 21, with an average age at first childbirth of 17. All were living in England: twelve in the Midlands, seventeen in the North and four in the South.

Twenty-two participants were 'care leavers'¹⁴, and had been in care for between one and eighteen years. A further two had been in care for brief periods only and nine had never been in care. The mean length of time in care was nearly six years. About half of those who had been in care had left care from a foster placement, and half from residential care. They left care to live independently between the ages of 15 and 18¹⁵. The mean age for leaving care was 16, in line with the national average (DOH 2001a). The final ethnic composition of the sample was: twenty-five White British; two mixed parentage; two British Asian; two Pakistani; one Black-Caribbean; and one Black African¹⁶.

They had a total of thirty-nine children between them. Twenty-seven participants had one child and six had two children. Seven were pregnant for the second time at the time of first interview. The children were aged between 4 weeks and 5 years, with an average age of 1 year. Sadly, one young mother had two children currently in care and one young woman's baby had died, but all other children were living with their mothers.

¹⁴ That is, they had been in care for more than 6 months, and had been in care or on a care order to the age of at least 16.

¹⁵ Their own definition may, in certain cases, differ from official definitions. For example, one young woman described herself as being 'kicked out' of residential care at the age of fifteen. However, officially, she continued to be on a care order for longer, whilst living in insecure accommodation, alone or with her boyfriend.

¹⁶ See Appendix III, page 294 for classification of ethnicity used.

Figure 1
Ages of participants

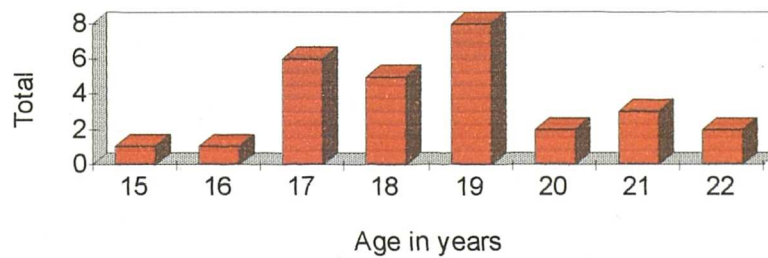


Figure 2
Ages of their children

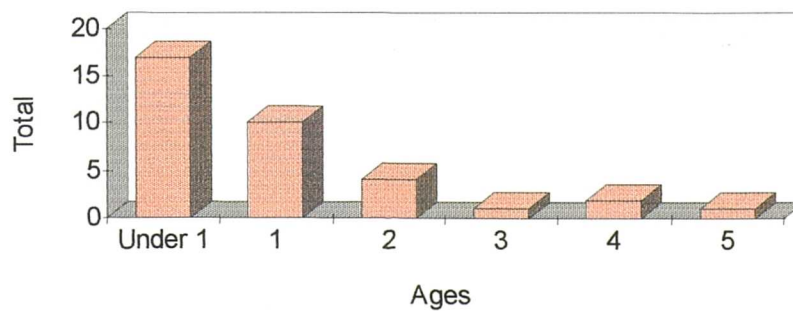


Figure 3
Age at first childbirth

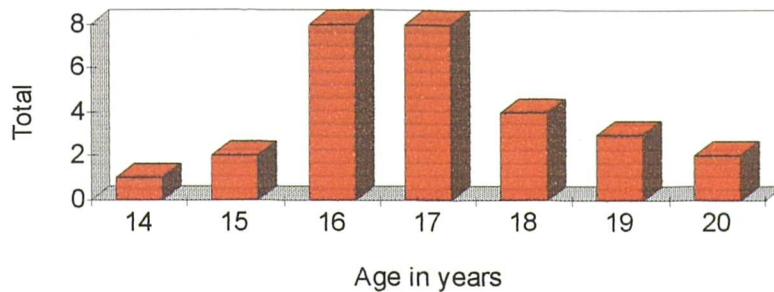


Figure 4
Regions where participants lived

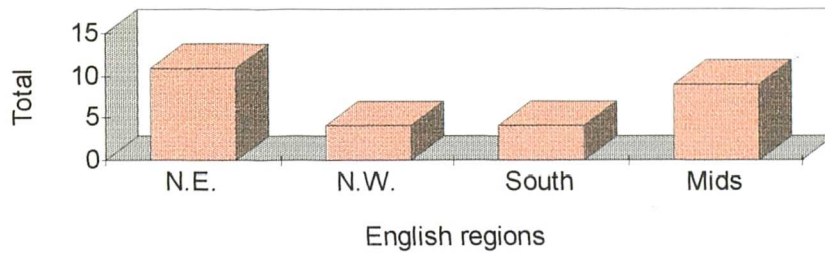


Figure 5
Ethnicity

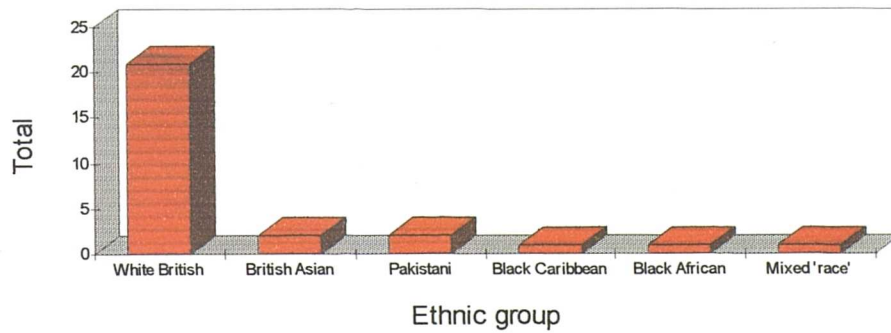
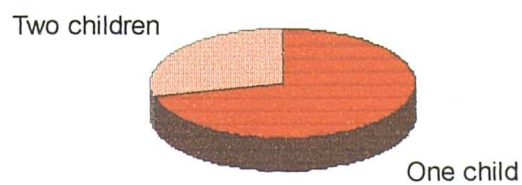
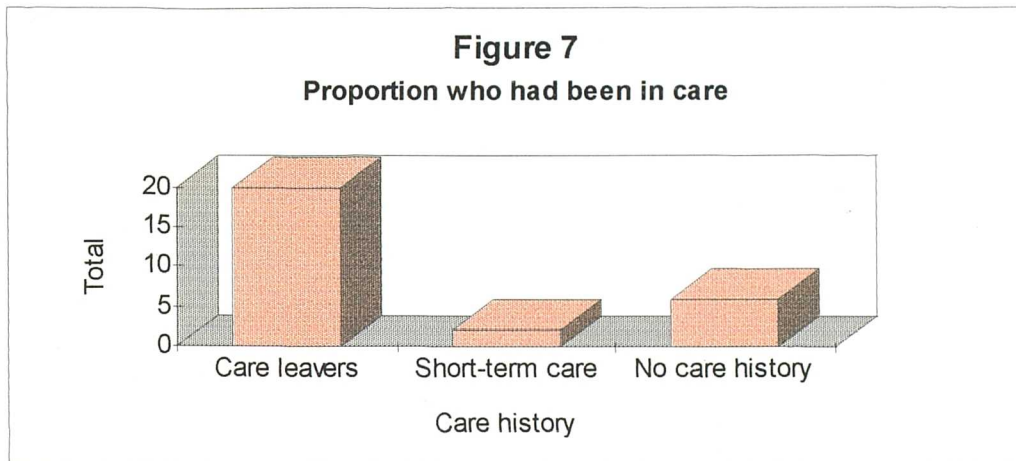
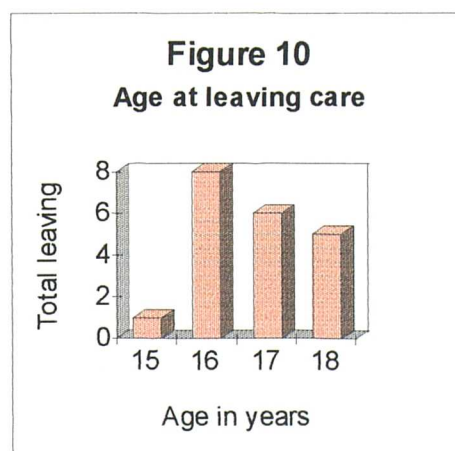
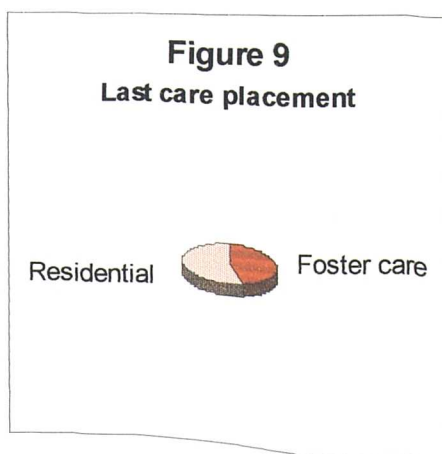
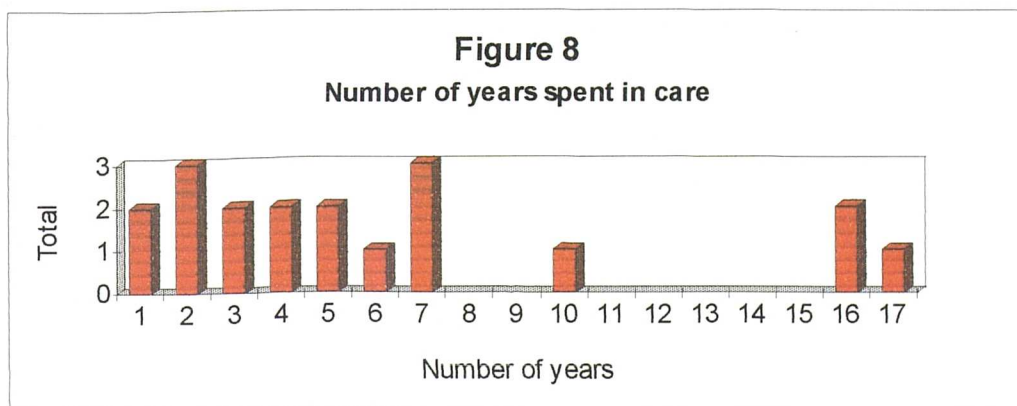


Figure 6
Number of children per family





Figures 8-10: Characteristics of sub-sample of care leavers (n=20)



The sample therefore were all living in England, and predominantly in the North, although including some young women from the Midlands and South of England. The individual interview sample includes seven participants from minority ethnic groups, making a quarter of the sample for this stage. The sample of care leavers appears to meet the criteria for typicality, in terms of age on leaving care and the balance between foster care and residential care as last placement. The whole sample also includes young women who gave birth at a wide variety of ages, from 14 to 21. The findings therefore have particular relevance to young mothers who have been in care or who live in deprived areas, but within these limitations the participants displayed heterogeneity, as illustrated in the tables on pages 93-5.

The interview method

Whilst the research sought to explore the meanings and experiences of early motherhood, this could have been achieved using a variety of qualitative methods, including the traditional ethnographic method of observation. The latter has advantages in enabling the researcher to build up trusting relationships over time. It can also be more clearly claimed that what is recorded relates directly to the lived experience of participants. However, interviewing was preferred in this study for several reasons. Firstly, the subject matter of the research makes it difficult to access through observation, since it examines 'private' lives, including relationships and parenting. It might have been possible to carry out ethnography with the young women attending a support group, but this would have been difficult to arrange because the young women required a confidential and, to some extent, closed environment within their groups on a regular basis. Furthermore, this still would not have provided direct observation of the lived experience of

mothering. Finally, interviewing was preferred for the kind of analysis I wished to conduct, which involved relatively detailed analysis of conversations, and in which the young women made links between their past and present lives. These accounts could, I felt, best be accessed through interviews.

Group interviews

The first phase of interviewing took the form of group interviews. The group interview, or focus group method¹⁷ has been used in a number of studies of sexuality, adolescent sexuality, and parenting (Mix et al. 1988; Lengua and Rosa 1992; Barker and Rich 1992; Taylor and Ward 1991), as well as in studies of girls, femininity and sexuality (Lees 1986; Griffin 1986).

Five group interviews were conducted with between four and nine participants, during May and June 1999. In most cases, the young women knew each other prior to the interview, in some cases, over several years. The use of pre-existing groups enables participants to bring their knowledge of each other to bear on the discussion (Kitzinger 1995) and may also have helped to redress some of the power imbalance between researcher and researched. Interviews lasted around an hour, and refreshments were provided. The participants were paid £10 for taking part, out of NCH funds. Young people who attend NCH meetings as representatives of service users are frequently paid for their time, and this was felt to be a way of acknowledging the value of their time and contribution.

¹⁷ The term 'group interview' is preferred here to that of 'focus groups', (a) because these interviews were not conducted only to 'focus' the research questions in later stages of fieldwork, but also provided a form of research material in their own right, and (b) because they did not follow the sampling approach used by focus group research, but were based on pre-existing groups.

The group discussions were based around a number of themes and trigger questions, concerning attitudes to teenage pregnancy, early motherhood, youth, gender, social support, and service provision¹⁸. Where possible, intervention was kept to a minimum, being used to avoid obvious digression, to try to ensure equal contributions, and for clarification purposes. The short questionnaire at the end of interviews also provided an opportunity to make written comments on the interview process, and to opt in or out of the individual interview stage.

There were three main reasons for the use of group interviews: their advantages in the study of sensitive subjects, their use as a preliminary or exploratory stage of interviewing, and their use as a particular form of data in their own right. Group interviews can be particularly useful in the study of sensitive subjects (Kitzinger 1994, 1995) and in research with children and young people (Krueger 1994; Shaw 1996). Some young participants may prefer the group setting, as they may feel there is less pressure on them as individuals, and that they have more power to control their contributions. A group setting can sometimes make it easier for research participants to discuss 'taboo' subjects as less inhibited group members can 'break the ice' for others (Kitzinger 1995). Similarly, group interviews can be useful in researching people who are relatively powerless (Krueger 1994), enabling participants to, 'articulate their experiences in ways that break away from the clichés of dominant cultural constructions' (Kitzinger 1994: 112).

In practice, the group situation often seemed to allow the young women 'strength in numbers' and they clearly supported each other in telling their stories. They shared secret jokes and frequently produced joint narratives. Many of them clearly

¹⁸ See Appendix VI, pages 296-7.

enjoyed the event and commented on this. Group interviews enabled the young women to 'check out' both the researcher and the research, enabling a degree of trust to be developed. They also allowed participants to make a more informed choice about taking part in an individual interview, and may be a reason for the high level of attendance for individual interviews.

Group interviews were also used as a first, exploratory stage of interviewing. Attention to both the themes and linguistic repertoires that participants employ in a group setting may aid in the construction of a sensitive and appropriate framework for individual interviews. They also enabled me to learn something of their individual experiences and opinions, to which I was able to refer back in individual interviews.

Group interviews also constitute a useful source of research material in their own right, providing access to group discourses which may complement or contrast with those employed in a one-to-one setting. The differences between the two sets of interview material can be instructive. Flick (1998) asserts that group procedures can come close to the kind of situation in which opinions are 'produced, expressed and exchanged', thus creating 'an interactional situation that comes closer to everyday life than the (often one-off) encounter of interviewer and interviewee or narrator permits' (114). Where they worked well and there was an atmosphere of trust established within the group, this certainly seemed to be the case, although it seemed to depend upon the preferences and modes of interaction of particular individuals.

Discussion within a supportive environment can also facilitate access not only to what people think, but also to 'how they think and why they think that way' (Kitzinger 1995: 299). Group dynamics, therefore, can be used as a central source of knowledge in that they are likely to facilitate the articulation of 'public' discourses. In a relaxed and supportive group setting, interviews can also allow differences between group members to emerge. These can then be used to clarify why people believe what they do, as well as highlighting the diversity of experiences within a seemingly homogenous group (Griffin 1986; Kitzinger 1994, 1995). There are a number of excerpts used in this thesis where discourse was jointly constructed by several women, each building upon the contribution of other speakers. Shared norms are apparent in such examples. Group interview transcripts are also frequently characterised by more light-hearted banter between group members but in some cases, less emotionally or personally revealing contributions were made in group interviews than individually.

Group interviews also have potential disadvantages: namely, problematic group dynamics, the silencing of dissenting voices (Kitzinger 1994; 1995), the discomfort that some people have in speaking in groups, and the potential for breaches of confidentiality. In practice, the first three were evident at points. In one group, one participant dominated much of the discussion. In another, there was considerable tension between two participants resulting from ongoing antagonism. After a third, one participant expressed concern that I might have received a very negative impression of how they felt about motherhood, which she had felt unable to counter sufficiently at the time. I was able to reassure her that I had recognised that there were diverse opinions within the group, and she was

subsequently able to express her own views more freely in an individual interview. Two young women chose not to take part in a group but to be interviewed individually. In one case, this was due to concerns about confidentiality and privacy relating to her experience of sexual abuse. However, these drawbacks were outweighed by the considerable advantages of this method, and data from group interviews provided an important source of data for analysis.

In two group interviews, a project worker was present for the first part of the interview, with the permission of the young women. The project workers in these two cases asked to be present initially because of difficult group dynamics¹⁹. In three interviews children were present, either being cared for by project staff in the same room or in one case by their mothers. The presence of the project workers, particularly, may have consequences for the content of interviews. This is more likely to be the case in the third group, where the project worker actually participated in the discussion at points. The advantage of having these workers present for me lay in their good relationships with the young women, which enabled an early rapport to be established. Clearly, the comments during interview by one worker may have had an effect on the young women's responses, but this is included in the transcription where it occurred and the responses of participants to such interventions can be assessed. The possibility that the young women were saying what they believed project workers would want to hear seems to be countered by the fact that participants were quite critical of service provision in the presence of workers. Furthermore, in both cases, the workers left within the first half of the interview.

¹⁹ In one, she was concerned that violence might erupt between two participants.

Prior to the individual interview stage, audio recordings of four group interviews were transcribed in sufficient detail for a thematic analysis to be conducted²⁰. All questions and verbal responses were transcribed, and significant pauses, laughter, or emphases were also noted. Interviews were then coded with the aid of Atlas Ti, a software package for qualitative data analysis. The codes used were generated from the research questions and from the interview material (Boulton and Hammersley 1996), shaping the main themes to be covered in the individual interviews which, in turn, facilitated the development of an interview guide.

Individual interviews

The main phase of the fieldwork consisted of a set of twenty-eight semi-structured interviews. An initial pilot was carried out with an older first-time mother²¹. Most of the individual interviews were set up with the assistance of the same project workers who had been involved with the groups. Participants were given the option of being seen in their own home or at another location to suit them, but only two young women who attended projects chose their homes. The final four interviews, all with young women who had not taken part in a group interview, were also conducted in their own homes. The setting may have influenced the data. Indeed, it is interesting to note that most of the interviews that took place at home were among the longest and richest. However, there could be a variety of reasons for this, including the stage in the fieldwork and the high level of articulacy of these individual participants. In general, the projects seemed to

²⁰ A fifth group interview was not taped, but notes were coded as far as possible.

²¹ It was not considered appropriate to use a young mother who was a care leaver for a pilot interview, due to the potential vulnerability of the young women involved in the main phase of the research

constitute a safe environment for many of the young women, and project workers with whom they often had a good level of trust and rapport were on hand to provide any necessary support. In about half the projects, childcare was also provided whilst the interviews were conducted.

The primary motivation for using semi-structured interviews was to get 'inside' the participants' social worlds; to gain access to the meanings, classificatory systems, narrative and discursive repertoires in operation in these worlds. The interviewing style adopted was one in which interviewees are seen as active participants, rather than 'speaking questionnaires' (Potter and Wetherell 1987). A loose interview format and relatively informal conversational techniques also allows for more diversity in accounts (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Individual interviews, flexibly structured, can allow the uniqueness of each participant's story to become apparent, highlighting the range of experiences and understandings and thereby making diversity and difference manifest.

The individual interviews were based on a naturalistic, conversational and exploratory interviewing technique. Again, it is hoped that this would enable participants to have a part in shaping the agenda. A naturalistic approach was also important in building rapport and a degree of trust. My main aims as an interviewer were to listen carefully, to follow the participant's pacing, and to prompt only when necessary. At a number of points during the course of the fieldwork, the young women talked about issues and events that were clearly painful for them. Under these circumstances, it is necessary for the researcher to provide some recognition of the emotional content of the interview, and to

respond with some kind of support and affirmation. I followed Plummer's advice concerning life history interviewing, in which he likens the role of the interviewer to that of the Rogerian 'non-directive, phenomenologically aware counsellor'. Key features of this role are, 'the uniqueness of the person and the situation, the importance of empathy and the embodiment of "non-possessive warmth" in the interviewer' (Plummer 1983: 95).

Kennedy Bergen similarly argues that feminist methods allowed her to interact with the women she interviewed as, 'counsellor, researcher, and woman' (1993). There are clearly differences between the research role and the counselling role, particularly in the lack of challenging by the research interviewer, but these differences are partly a question of emphasis. As Kvale (1996) points out, both the therapeutic and the semi-structured research encounter are forms of non-positivistic interviewing. In a therapeutic situation, the primary goal is to provide support and empathy, in order to facilitate personal change. In a research interview on a sensitive topic, the thoughts and actions of the researcher are focused both on the gathering of 'data', and on the need to be supportive and empathic (Brannen 1988; Kennedy Bergen 1993; Kvale 1996). However, it was not *assumed* that the interviews would be painful processes for interviewees. To take up such a position is to assume difficulties in the young women's lives that may not exist. Some interviewees told their stories in a 'matter-of-fact' manner, and some described an unproblematic and smooth transition to independence and motherhood, whilst others told long stories of disruption, trauma, abuse or social isolation. It was therefore necessary to adapt my interviewing style according to the style of the telling, as well as the content of the story.

The interview began with a brief exploration of current circumstances. The participant was then asked to talk through her experiences of motherhood, from around the time of pregnancy to the present day. It was hoped that this approach would enable young women's narratives of motherhood and of leaving care to emerge. In some cases this provided enough of a framework for the interview, triggering the 'telling of their story'. In such interviews I was led in my questioning by the participant. Other participants gave much shorter answers and loose structuring was less productive, since they appeared to require more specific questioning or more tightly structured discussion. In such cases I tended to rely more on a more structured set of questions (see Appendix V, pages 298-299).

Sometimes I got it wrong, asking questions which appeared to make inaccurate assumptions about participants or were leading. Sometimes the use of an apparently leading question was actually an attempt on my part to clarify or to reflect back something that had already been said by a participant. Sometimes, however, leading questions were simply errors, because interviewing is messy and imperfect, and a skill that I did not always get right! Nevertheless, such errors can, at times, lead to useful and interesting responses, and some of the excerpts used in this thesis provide examples of this²². This confirms for me the need to include the role of the interviewer in analysis of interviews, and my view of the interview as actively and interactively constructed.

Whilst some of the young women talked about their past, and in some cases about trauma and abuse, they were not directly asked to do so. In addition to these 'narrative' elements of the interview, some more thematic questions were asked,

²² For example, the excerpt from Nazia, pages 124-5.

where they were not volunteered initially in the participants' 'story'. These covered informal social support, the role of the baby's father, experiences of service provision, material circumstances, education and training.

Interviews concluded with a discussion of plans and hopes for the future, and participants were given the opportunity to add anything that had not been covered that they considered important. Interviews lasted between thirty-five minutes and nearly three hours, with an average length of an hour. As in group interviews, participants were asked to complete the short questionnaire for demographic details, and payment of £10 per interview was made, funded by NCH. I ensured that participants knew where to find my contact details on their information leaflet, and they were told that they could contact me if there was anything else they wished to mention.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Analysis is not a discrete stage, but is carried out throughout fieldwork (Kvale 1996). However, this section describes the formal stages of analysis of interview material, from the point of initial transcription to interpretation of the meaning within and across interview material.

Initial transcription and coding

Individual interviews were initially transcribed and coded in the same way as the group interviews (see page 102). First, coding categories were set up based on coding two transcripts and the coding frame used for group transcripts. New categories were added as they arose from coding further interviews. Items

allocated to the same code were then pulled together and examined for commonalities, differences and patterns (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Boulton and Hammersley 1996; Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

Coding was used as an 'an heuristic device' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). It was more than a data management tool, since it provided an overview of all interviews and thus a wider view than is possible through more detailed analysis of specific segments alone. It also provided an analysis focusing more on content than process, and the social contextualisation necessary for closer examination of the meanings of early motherhood²³. However, coding and categorisation across interviews can have the unwanted effect of fragmenting participants' lives, leading to a loss of connections, continuities and discontinuities both in each life and in the recounting of the story (Potter and Wetherell 1987; 1994). Therefore, a second stage of transcription and analysis was conducted to explore how participants constructed meaning through their accounts.

Detailed transcription and analysis

Following coding, lengthier interview segments were selected for detailed analysis. Coding provided the basis of selection of these segments, through revealing the dominant ways in which the young women talked about their experiences and the themes that recurred throughout the research. Coding using computerised data management also allowed ease of location of discourse units concerned with particular aspects of experience. Whilst the coding produced short segments of talk, these were positioned within longer stretches of interview

²³ Coding also formed the basis for the report written for NCH.

material that revealed connections between different themes and different aspects of the young women's accounts. This is more difficult to achieve when using traditional 'cut and paste' techniques, since this tends to fragment accounts.

Selected segments were re-transcribed using a simplified version of the Sacks-Schegloff-Jefferson system of transcription notation (Linde 1993; Atkinson and Heritage 1984) (see pages VII-IX). This allows a more in-depth analysis of the meaning and emotional content of interview talk, as well as of the ways in which meaning is constructed. All material longer than a single phrase used in this thesis was subjected to this level of transcription. Given the extremely time-consuming nature of this task it was restricted to selected segments only, taken from the audio-recorded interviews (four groups and twenty-three individuals).

Transcription is inherently bound up with theory (Cameron 2001). Interviews were not being considered purely as reports of events, so much as particular descriptive and evaluative accounts of events, told in particular ways in a specific context. Paralinguistic features, including stress, loudness and overlapping speech can also communicate a great deal of the meaning of an event for a particular individual, or the strength of an expressed viewpoint. A further aspect of this is that transcription does not necessarily follow grammatical rules, but indicates speech forms. Commas, for example, indicate short pauses between words, and the participants' own grammar and dialect are retained where possible. It was considered important to include such features, as they can provide insight into the way a story is told, with what force and what emotion.

The interpretation of meaning

During and following re-transcription, interview material was analysed for the meanings young women gave to their experience and life-worlds. Such meanings can be accessed through their talk, and through examining how their accounts are constructed to serve particular functions. Meaning may be interpreted in different ways by different researchers. It is therefore necessary to be explicit about how a particular interpretation is arrived at employing what Kvale calls a 'perspectival subjectivity' (1996: 212).

The ways in which accounts are constructed depend on the context of the telling, the rhetorical strategies employed, and the wider discursive resources upon which the narrator is able to draw. Riessman (1993), for example, asserts that,

Informants' stories do not mirror a world 'out there'. They are constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and interpretive... Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly. (Riessman 1993: 5, 15)

Interview conversation takes a number of forms. Whether in individual or group interviews, discourse units can take the form of narrative segments (classical, hypothetical, or habitual narratives) (Riessman 1990, 1991, 1993), arguments, jokes, explanations, descriptions, and plans (Linde 1993). Interviews also consist of many question and answer exchanges that do not take the form of distinct discourse units (Linde 1993). All these forms of talk occur at points, as different ways of describing and giving meaning to experience, and all are presented in this thesis.

One strategy used by the participants was that of story-telling or narratives. These narratives, whilst having connections with their overall story, were also self-contained. Where they occurred, they were analysed in terms of the meaning contained in them. Where participants did construct narratives, it was interesting to observe how these were built up. The key work on narrative structures is that of Labov (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov 1972), who describes a narrative as consisting of a number of core components, each of which performs a function. These are: an abstract (providing a summary of the narrative), an orientation (description of the context and people), the complicating action (what happened, in temporal sequence), an evaluation (the meaning of the narrative) a resolution (the ending of the story), and the coda, which takes us back into the present (Labov op. cit.). In this thesis I refer to some of these components (particularly in Chapter Seven) where they occur, but I was not generally concerned with analysing the structure of narratives in detail.

More pertinent than the structure of the narrative itself is the fact that this type of analysis allows the researcher to pose the question, 'why does an informant develop her talk this way in conversation with this listener?' (Riessman 1993: 61). Narratives can be viewed, from an interpretivist perspective, as stories constructed by narrators in particular ways for particular purposes (Mishler 1986; Riessman 1993; Josselson and Lieblich 1993; Lieblich and Josselson 1994). Stories are generally told to make a point (Polanyi 1985; Langelier 1989; Rubin and Rubin 1995): 'a story without a point is like a joke without a punchline – boring and annoying' (Langelier 1989: 246). A story can be seen as a culturally available tool used to formulate an argument that it might be difficult to make through other

linguistic means. In particular, it may be used to answer difficult or threatening questions or to describe oneself in ways that might seem inappropriate if addressed directly (Rubin and Rubin 1995). A key function of a narrative is to provide a way of linking events and of creating both coherence and meaning out of events which might otherwise, at times, seem disparate or difficult to comprehend (Linde 1993). Narrative segments are therefore treated as one genre of discourse, which often take a particular structure to achieve a desired effect.

These different forms of talk are all employed in ways that give meaning to the reporting of events, and it was the ways in which meaning was produced that I wished to explore. However, the production of meaning cannot be considered outside of wider contextual factors. Such factors include the overall 'story' within which, implicitly or explicitly, meanings of particular experiences were situated and the interactional context of the interview itself.

The overall 'narrative'

It is important to distinguish the overall story, or narrative as *the* story (Mishler 1986), from the telling of stories *within* interviews. The overall 'narrative' (of narrative as the story) referred to here relates to the young women's stories of events occurring over time, from the point of pregnancy to the present. Some also made links with earlier childhood experiences. It may also be useful to distinguish between narrative analysis as might be conducted by a narratologist (for example, in terms of causal and temporal sequencing or emplotment) and what I am referring to here, which is more concerned with the sense the young women make of their stories, and also how these stories place the issue of early motherhood in

its biographical and social context.

For some young women, the individual interview explicitly took the form of 'story-telling', or of a life story²⁴. These participants narrated events that took place over time, making connections between them, in ways that indicate the meanings that are given to them. In other cases, the narrative structure was much less pronounced or events were not necessarily described using a linear model of time. Nevertheless, the researcher can act as a 'narrative creator', moulding different happenings into a coherent story (Kvale 1996). This is the main purpose of Chapters Four and Five, in which the young women's overall narratives are central and where transitions over time are chronologically described.

The interactional context and co-construction of accounts

The material analysed was produced in the different interactional contexts provided by group and individual interviews. Variability and consistency *between* these two forms of discourse can provide insights into the production of accounts in different settings. Group interviews contain points where meaning is constructed out of diversity and disagreement, as well as discourse based on shared and agreed meaning²⁵. They also contain complex interpersonal dynamics (see pages 100-101).

The most important point is not to attempt to control for 'bias' - an unattainable objective - but that the interactional context is acknowledged. This is achieved

²⁴ Two young women, Nicola and Emma, described the interview as their 'life story'. Both also commented that they could be on the Jerry Springer Show.

²⁵ Examples of both of these can be found on pages 208-10 and 245.

through detailed transcription to show how things are said, presenting interview material in such a way that the reader can assess how the response relates to the questioning. It also involves being open to the possibility that participants' remarks are the outcome of reactivity, rather than providing a window on their life-worlds. I have already mentioned the possibility that some responses were the result of a leading question (see page 105) and I argued that this, though not ideal, was sometimes productive. The interviewer cannot stand outside of the social world, and therefore I brought some of my assumptions (whether consciously or not) into the interview situation. However, I have included all relevant questions and my responses in excerpts, even those that are inept or leading, because this allows the reader to question my interpretation, based on analysis of the joint interaction.

For these reasons, in the following chapters, preceding questions are included or described where possible²⁶, and transcribed material has not been 'tidied up' - that is, paralinguistic features and interjections and interruptions from the interviewer and from group members are included where audible. Thus, it is important to attend, not just to what is said in interviews, but also to the *process* by which meaning is produced.

In conducting this analysis, a number of questions were asked of each segment of interview material, as follows:

- What does the participant appear to understand to be the meaning of her statements?

²⁶ There are some restrictions on how far this it is possible to provide full interactional details in a thesis, due to the pressure of word limits. At some points, the preceding conversation is therefore described rather than being presented in full.

- How does she convey this meaning, in terms of linguistic and paralinguistic features of the interaction?
- What is the wider social context of the statement?
- What discursive resources is the participant drawing upon in constructing meaning?
- How does this statement fit into this young woman's overall narrative?
- Are there other interpretations of the statements, besides that of the participant? If so, what evidence is there to support these other interpretations?

In Chapters Five to Eight, material is drawn from a range of interviews, selected to highlight how the young women talk about a number of key themes and the connections between them, including motherhood, youth, leaving care, gender identity and gender relations. Clearly choices had to be made in what was included and what was left out. In doing so I tried to ensure that I was led by the interview material, that is, by the themes that recurred across interviews. Within these broad emergent themes I attempted to represent the heterogeneity of accounts and experiences across interviews.

One major dilemma was the wish to maintain the integrity of accounts, whilst having to analyse common themes across interviews. Of necessity, some aspects of interviews are dealt with in less depth than are others. For example, some participants told in-depth stories about their childhood and time in care. Some participants also had two children, or had children who were up to five years old, and capturing the detail of experience over several years of motherhood was not possible. Given that every thesis is a selection of material and themes from research, the following chapters are based on those themes that leapt out at me,

occurred in many cases and seemed to fit the young women's socio-cultural worlds. This led me to consider the young women's stories of the transition to motherhood (Chapters Four and Five), their accounts of the meanings of parenthood (Chapter Six), their awareness and negotiation of hegemonic discourses and practices around 'teenage motherhood' and young people who have been in care (Chapters Seven and Eight).

VALIDITY AND GENERALISABILITY

Qualitative research is concerned with meaning construction. The key issue is the contribution that findings make to theory, rather than their generalisability to populations (Bryman 1988). Therefore, traditional criteria for evaluation such as external validity and replicability have little relevance here. The appropriate criterion is internal validity, or the extent to which the evidence fits the theorisation. This can be achieved through, 'a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation' (Ward Schofield 1989: 202).

More than once during the course of this research, I was asked, 'how do you know they told you the truth?' Leaving aside for a moment the implication that these young women are not to be trusted, the question is, in many ways, an irrelevance. Accounts given in research interviews are inevitably jointly constructed as a result of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, and responses given are also influenced by the interview setting. This does not invalidate such accounts, but the fact that they are not factual statements of 'the truth' needs to be

acknowledged, along with the ways in which the presence of the researcher (and in some cases, other individuals) may influence responses.

Moreover, we have no way of knowing whether research participants ever tell us the truth, whatever the methods used. The doubts cast over the 'truth' of the accounts may relate to underlying social anxieties about the young women's moral standing and the safety of their children. In exploring how the young women make sense of their own lives, I am not seeking to show whether or not they make 'good enough' mothers, or whether the outcomes for themselves or their children are more negative than for their peers. Rather, I am attempting to provide an interpretation and theorisation of the meanings of motherhood for them.

Although the findings of this study have a number of implications for policy, the study has limited generalisability to the population of young mothers for two key reasons. Firstly, it is based on a specific sub-sample of teenage mothers – those who have grown up in care or in circumstances of social deprivation. The heterogeneity amongst teenage mothers (Allen and Bourke-Dowling 1998) is thus not fully represented in this sample. Secondly, generalisability is limited because of the use of qualitative methods which, of necessity, involves a relatively small sample.

Nevertheless, 'reasonable extrapolation' (Williams and May 1996), 'comparability' or 'translatability' (Goetze and LeCompte (1984) are perfectly possible. That is, whilst we cannot make universal laws of causation, this is not to reject the idea that we can make 'modest speculations on the likely applicability of

findings' (Williams and May op. cit.) to other similar situations. Generalisation based on this study is therefore made cautiously, but it is considered reasonable to do so to a limited extent, particularly given that this study employed different forms of interviewing (groups and individuals) and was conducted across multiple sites.

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that a post-positivist approach to research allows for a focus on the meanings of experiences of motherhood for marginalised young women, and that it provides a means of foregrounding their perspectives. Interviews have been used since these methods are seen as particularly suitable for research that seeks to explore young women's accounts. A critical form of discourse analysis facilitates a detailed exploration of the ways in which participants construct the meanings of early motherhood. It is also considered important to take accounts of the young women's overall narrative, the interactional context, and the social context within which the interview is embedded.

Chapters Four and Five focus particularly closely on the young women's narratives of the transition to motherhood. However, these events took place against the backdrop of a number of other transitions, including changes in relationships and the move to independence. The transitions negotiated by the young women interact in complicated ways, and consequently the presentation of the young women's accounts is equally complex. Although some young women used a clearly recognisable, classic narrative structure of events unfolding over time, not all did so. Others talked in a much more circular manner, so that events

appeared almost interwoven. However, in order to try to find a way into describing some of this complexity whilst still presenting a coherent account, a chronological narrative structure is used in these chapters.

Chapters Six and Seven are less concerned with overall narratives and more with the meanings which young women give to their experiences, and the discursive resources they draw upon in talking about them. Whilst this is a question of emphasis, these later chapters draw more on aspects such as the meanings of motherhood for the young women, and how they negotiate their identities in relation to discursive and social practices around 'teenage motherhood' and leaving care.

In each chapter, interview material is analysed in a way that allows for the recognition of the relationship between discourse and social practices. This is also conducted in a way which seeks to acknowledge how young women employ pre-existing discursive resources, but do so actively - through addressing, subverting or resisting popular discourses of 'teenage mothers' and care leavers, and also through telling their own unique stories.

Chapter Four

Accounts of Pregnancy

There was nothing to lose, and everything to gain. (Ebele)

This chapter explores the young women's accounts of pregnancy, including their social circumstances and the ways in which they talk about this key transition. As such, it sets out to answer the question, 'what are the meanings they give to the experience of pregnancy, and how do these meanings change over the time of pregnancy?' A central feature of these pregnancy narratives is dealing with unexpected change in a life course and making gradual adjustment. The young women's lives are characterised by a series of transitions, including housing, family, relationship and lifestyle transitions, and the way they tell their stories reflects this. They often do not tell a linear, self-contained story. As MacDonald and Coffield note,

It is often immensely difficult to identify a coherent, unitary or linear trajectory from the mess and jumble of individual's biographies. Life is not as simple as the step-by-step model implied in this approach. (1991: 92)

I have tried to retain a sense of this complexity. At the same time, I have centred on pregnancy as a key transition, as particularly in its early stages, it forms a 'critical moment' (Sparkes 1995) or turning point in both narratives and lives.

The first section of this chapter examines initial reactions to pregnancy, and questions the notion of a clear division between planned and unplanned pregnancies (cf. Allen and Bourke-Dowling 1998; Tabberer et al. 2000). A discussion is also provided of 'reasons' for pregnancy. This reveals a frequent disjuncture between reasons given for their own pregnancy (usually accidental

and due to failed contraception) and reasons for pregnancy amongst other young women (such as to get a house, or for love and attention). Some participants considered abortion and these accounts are also explored. Others tell stories in which the reactions of significant others (such as partners and parents) feature as major elements, and these reactions are described in the second section. This is important not only for what it tells us about how their stories are constructed in relation to their social context, and also about their support networks. The final section examines stories of change and reform during later stages of pregnancy. Many young women describe their feelings about being pregnant altering, and in some cases, this involved significant personal and lifestyle changes at this time.

EARLY STAGES OF PREGNANCY

The young women became pregnant between the ages of 13 and 20, and mothers between 14 and 21 (see figure 3, page 93). Most moved home whilst pregnant, either through leaving the parental home or leaving care and, for some, this was their first move to independent living. When they found they were pregnant, four young women were living in a children's home¹, three in foster care and three in a semi-independence unit². One care leaver was living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and one in supported lodgings. Nine young women were living independently, seven with a partner and two alone. Eight of these nine had been in care. Seven participants were living with birth family (one or both parents), six of whom had not been in care. Whilst this description gives an indication of the situations of the young women in the initial stages of pregnancy, it provides a

¹ By their own definition.

² This is a residential unit for young people who are about to leave care, where young people take care of their own needs, with some support.

snapshot picture only. It cannot portray the insecurity and movement that characterise the lives of many care leavers.

On finding that they were pregnant, the young women reported reacting with a range of feelings, including: shock and distress; disbelief or numbness; surprise, confusion, uncertainty and ambivalence; excitement and happiness. A third felt shocked or upset. A few were scared. Some felt very confused and a few described an initial state of disbelief or denial. As Natasha commented, *'it was quite a big shock because I was only 16. I didn't know how to react. It sort of went over my head'*. Some pregnancies were unplanned but welcome. Others were initially unwanted, but an adjustment process took place in the following weeks. The range of responses reflects the different circumstances of their lives, and whether they had previously considered motherhood.

Planned or unplanned?

Much attention is paid to the fact that the majority of teenage pregnancies are unplanned (Allen and Bourke Dowling 1998; SEU 1999), but the concepts of choice and decision-making connote freedom to pick from a range of options. Thus, they fail to take into account the social, institutional and discursive contexts in which 'decisions' are made and which circumscribe available options. The young women made their 'choices' within the constraints created, for example, by poverty, youth unemployment and patriarchy. These were further limited, for some, by the institutional practices of having been in care.

The idea that women (of all ages) always clearly and consciously plan *not* to have

a baby, or equally plan to have a baby also merits questioning (McMahon 1995). The concepts of planned and unplanned pregnancy are based on the notion of the rational autonomous agent, and fail to take account of the non-rational, the subjective or the unconscious (Griffin 1993; Henriques et al. 1998). They also fail to take account of the complexity of contraceptive usage (Davies et al 2001).

Unplanned pregnancies are not restricted to this age group. In McMahon's (1995) study³ 71 per cent of middle-class and 46 per cent of working-class women with partners described their pregnancies with their first child as planned (McMahon 1995: 58, 93), leaving a substantial proportion of unplanned pregnancies. Unplanned pregnancy is also a majority experience amongst expectant mothers over 40 (Berryman 1991).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the young women's pregnancies had not been consciously 'planned'. Pregnancy, therefore, led to altered plans and expectations, and to shifts in identity. Many said they had wanted to become a mother at some point, but had had no intention of having a baby at this point. As Sonia stated, *'I wanted to be a mum. I wasn't planning to be a mum until I was in my twenties but I suppose your plans never come to when you plan it'*. Only one young woman had thought that she would be a mother by the time she was 18.

Sam's pregnancy was entirely unexpected. She was a care leaver and living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation when she became pregnant. She was shocked and confused for several weeks. At the same time, she was having difficulties in

³ The average age of the working-class women in McMahon's study was 22.1 years old, with an age spread of 16 to 39.

her relationship with her boyfriend. Over a period of several weeks she adjusted to the idea of pregnancy, as she describes in the following excerpt from a group interview:

Group Three

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|--|
| 1. | Sam | Me head were just in pieces, for them first few |
| 2. | | months I didn't know <u>where</u> I were or <u>what</u> I were |
| 3. | | doing. |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | PW ⁴ | Did you <u>talk</u> to anybody? |
| 6. | | |
| 7. | Sam | No, I wouldn't let pregnancy be <u>mentioned</u> , you |
| 8. | | know, for about two week. Just used to walk out |
| 9. | | of room and that. Didn't like it. I were trying to |
| 10. | | forget about it, and then [laughter from Anna] |
| 11. | | just got my head around it. |

For Sam, then, the early stages were characterised by confusion and an attempt to 'forget' the pregnancy. The question of termination did not appear to enter her thinking at this point and she appears, from this account, to have used a strategy of denial⁵. Many others, like Sam, reacted initially with shock. However, Sam's refusal to discuss the pregnancy with anyone else was unusual (although not unique), as is implied by Anna's laughter at the idea that it would be *possible* to forget about pregnancy. Sam's gradual adjustment ('I just got my head around it') is much more common. The sudden change in plans, and the disruption of their expected life course, meant that an adjustment period was necessary.

Four participants stated that they had planned their pregnancies. Two were first pregnancies, two second, and one young woman had two planned pregnancies.

⁴ Speech by a project worker is indicated by PW within the transcripts

⁵ As we shall see (on page 137), the complexity of these issues can be masked by treating these processes outside of their interpersonal context, and Sam's response to her pregnancy was also bound up with her relationship with the father of her baby.

However, there is a range of positions between 'planned' and 'unplanned'. Some women may not make a definite 'plan' of pregnancy, yet may not take measures to prevent it. For example, Trish remarked, '*it was like a case of, if I did, I did. If I didn't, I didn't*' and she and her partner were happy to find she was pregnant at 19. This was quite common, particularly for second pregnancies and for older 'teenagers', and supports previous findings (Davies et al. 2001) that young women living in deprived communities may not deliberately choose pregnancy, but may view it positively if it occurs.

In the following extract, Nazia provides an account of a 'planned' pregnancy at the age of 15 when living with foster carers. Her account highlights the contradictions and complexity in becoming pregnant and continuing with it.

Nazia⁶

1. A Was that unplanned?
- 2.
3. N Yeah, it was //A: Yeah// No, but it wasn't. Not really. I'm lying.
4. It was planned.
- 5.
6. A It was planned?
- 7.
8. N Yeah. But I don't - I tell everyone it wasn't.
- 9.
10. A Right =
- 11.
12. N = Well I didn't really know what I was doing. I thought I knew,
13. but I didn't.
- 14.
15. A That's interesting. So you tell everybody it was un. – it was =
- 16.
17. N = Unplanned.
- 18.
19. A But there was a bit - was there - what was the part of you

⁶ Any excerpts which do not state that they are from group interviews are from individual interviews.

20. that was =
 21.
 22. N = I, I, I did plan it really. I did want to get pregnant.

Here, it appears that Nazia draws on a discourse of unplanned pregnancy, launching into this initially, before contradicting herself. This sudden shift, from 'Yeah, it was', to 'No, but it wasn't' (line 3), marks her stepping out of both my assumptions and the dominant discourse. Despite her comment, 'I didn't really know what I was doing' (line 12) she also seems clear that at the time she wanted to get pregnant. This example highlights the contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalence that may exist around pregnancy. Also, Nazia's son was three at the time of interview, and the articulation of unplanned = unwanted in discourse may lead women to experience a sense of disloyalty to their child if they consider the child to have been unplanned.

Such complexities and ambiguities may lead one to question the apparently high rates of 'unplanned' pregnancy reported in the literature (SEU 1999), as there may be normative pressure for young women to declare pregnancy to be unplanned. Furthermore, 'the discourse of sexual deviance does not enable mainstream researchers to contemplate the possibility that these young women might have "chosen" to become pregnant outside marriage' (Griffin 1993: 174). Planned pregnancy may be equated with selfishness in young single women, and may therefore be difficult to articulate. Indeed, my closed question to Nazia takes 'unplanned' pregnancy as the norm amongst young women, and she has to contradict it in order to tell her own story.

Neither does the planned / unplanned binary fit with those who had *not* planned

pregnancy but were happy about it. This was sometimes mingled with surprise or ambivalence. As Sonia remarked, *'It was a surprise, but in a way, I was happy'*. However, ambivalence can also be seen as a feature of planned pregnancies and indeed, of mothering itself (R. Parker 1995; Hollway and Featherstone 1997). Around a third of participants said that pregnancy had been greeted immediately with happiness, and this included many 'unplanned' pregnancies. In addition, a few who had unplanned pregnancies reported deliberately choosing to say nothing to others until they were past the date for a termination.

'Reasons' for pregnancy

Many women are not able to clearly state a 'reason' for becoming mothers, and are rarely required to offer one. Moreover, 'articulated reasons should not be confused with causes. And absence of articulated reasons does not indicate a lack of meaning or reason... Reasons are called for when behaviour needs explaining. The "choice" of motherhood generally does not' (McMahon 1997: 52). In fact, it is usually *not* having children that needs explaining. However, *young* mothers may be asked to account for their status as mothers, yet, like other women, may be unable to do so. As Denise stated, *'I got pregnant because I got pregnant'*.

Most of those who gave a reason for pregnancy attributed it to failure of the contraceptive pill. A few stated that they had been using the pill inconsistently, or that they had been having unprotected sex in the belief that they were unable or highly unlikely to become pregnant. A few also believed they had been inadequately protected because of side-effects of the pill, such as nausea and vomiting. This accords with the findings of Davies et al. (2001) that the

difficulties of contraceptive use form an important and insufficiently recognised part of young women's accounts of unplanned pregnancy.

A commonly suggested reason for young women who have been in care *planning* pregnancy is to have 'something to love' (Corlyon and McGuire 1999). Whilst the negative emotional impact of being in care should not be minimised, the wish for 'someone to love' is not a motivation for pregnancy restricted to *young* women only, nor to those who have been in care. For example, 32 per cent of the middle-class women in McMahon's (1997) study described their wish for 'a relationship of love and nurturance' as a reason for their planned pregnancy. In the present study, the young women were more likely to say that this was a reason for being happy to find oneself pregnant or for deciding against termination, than a reason for planning pregnancy.

Nazia was the only participant who said that she had decided to get pregnant primarily for emotional reasons. The following excerpt follows immediately on from the previous one on pages 124-5.

Nazia

1. A Yeah. So you thought at that time that you'd like - you
2. would like =
- 3.
4. N = Well I didn't really think about it properly //A: Yeah//
5. All, I thought about was, well, if I've got my own baby
6. I've got someone to love and someone, you know
7. //A: Yeah// to live for, really.

The power of this statement appears to throw into relief the dominant discourse of teenage pregnancy as motivated by financial greed. Although Nazia is claiming that she did not consider the full implications of her wish for a child, this needs to

seen in the biographical context of an extremely difficult childhood and being taken into care in her early teenage years.

Considering termination or adoption

The young women for whom pregnancy was a shock or a surprise potentially faced the decision of abortion or adoption. Although adoption has become far less common since the 1960s, it has recently re-emerged on the policy agenda, with Jack Straw (the then Home Secretary) remarking, 'if you get a situation where young mothers feel happy about adoption that's so much the better. It is better if these adoptions are done voluntarily than if the children are later taken into care' (*The Times*, 26/01/99). Adoption is one of the options personal advisers will offer to pregnant teenagers under the Sure Start Plus programmes (TPU 2001). However, the young women, some of whom had been fostered at a very early age, believed adoption at birth to be highly undesirable. No participants had seriously considered it and very few participants considered it worth mentioning.

Several young women reported considering termination but deciding against it, and because it featured far more in their accounts, it is considered in more detail here than adoption. Sonia was the only participant who talked about a previous termination. She had considered continuing with this first pregnancy but had been at school, so had decided on termination. She then went to college and passed an NVQ Level 2 in childcare. Half way through studying for Level 3 she found herself pregnant again, when she missed taking the pill for two days. Despite pressure from her boyfriend to have a termination, she was adamant that she

would continue with the pregnancy.

Perceptions of others played a part in decisions around termination. For example, Ebele found herself pregnant aged 17, when living in a semi-independence unit. She feared how she might be perceived by others: *'It was like, "I can't keep the baby. My child isn't going to have a father. I'm going to be a stereotypical teenage mum, you know, and living off benefits" '.* Public perceptions may lead young women to feel they are in a no-win situation, of condemnation for abortion and equally for childbirth. This dilemma is particularly clearly stated by Emma in the following excerpt. She been talking about the difficulties of looking after two children, and had remarked that strangers would say it was her own fault for having them⁷.

Emma

1. You know, you get a lot of digging. Um - but if you was to have an
2. abo:rtion, or if you was to adopt them out, 'Oh, you know so-and-
3. so, she gave her kids away //A: Uh huh// She got rid of it'
4. //A:Uh huh// You know what I mean? So you can't win.//A: Mm//
5. You have kids, you get discriminated against. You don't have kids
6. you get discriminated against //A: Mm// again. So - you know, it's a
7. no-win situation.

Emma builds to her point that 'it's a no-win situation', through describing a hypothetical scenario of having an abortion or placing the child for adoption in which, whatever she did, the outcome would be 'discrimination'. In doing so, she makes the point that, whether a pregnancy is planned or unplanned, negative connotations, often of moral defectiveness, will follow.

⁷ See page 223 for preceding remarks.

Some young women employed a discourse of rational decision-making, describing carefully weighing up arguments for and against abortion, often through forming lists. Ebele continued her previous comments about not wanting to be a 'stereotypical teenage mum' with the following remarks, which form part of a longer narrative of finding out about her pregnancy:

Ebele

1. I just kept on thinking about it. It was, it got to a stage where I had to
2. write pros and cons. //A: Yeah// You know, a pro of keeping the
3. baby, a con of keeping the baby, a pro of not keeping the baby, a
4. con. It's was like, 'Oh dear'. But in the end I decided to keep the
5. baby. You know, (effectively) there was nothing to lose, and
6. everything to gain. So, yes.

Here, Ebele describes a process of weighing up the rational arguments for and against continuing with pregnancy, through repetition of 'pro' and 'con'. Her final remark appears to resonate with previous findings that working-class young women may have such limited opportunities that they have nothing to lose through becoming mothers (Phoenix 1991a; McRobbie 1991; Campbell 1993a). However, in the context of Ebele's biography, this does not appear to be the case. Despite spending most of her life in foster care, Ebele was halfway through her 'A' levels and was planning to go to university when she became pregnant. Thus, her comment that she had 'nothing to lose' needs to be considered alongside her outlook on life, influenced by past events, which had led her to conclude that there is no one single route through life, but a variety of ways of reaching the same point. The following remarks follow a question about whether she had ever imagined becoming a young mother before becoming pregnant:

Ebele

1. E Um, have you heard that quote 'Of Mice and Men'? 'All the
2. things that...' it's something about all the things that you plan
3. never turn out right. //A: (unclear). [laughs]// John, John,
4. John Steinbeck or something.
5.
6. A Yeah, what is it? What roughly?
7.
8. E Um, something about, the plans, all laid plans, don't always lay
9. plans... Yeah.
10.
11. [Laughter].
12.
13. A Yeah. Yeah. Your plans don't necessarily go according to
14. //E: Yeah// how you //E: Yeah// plan them out, basically.
15.
16. E Uh huh. Basically, that's just how my life has turned out to be.
17. For instance, my Dad, brought us to this country, hoping we
18. would go to, you know, school, go to college, //A: Uh huh//
19. you know, be the average, everyday, teenager //A: Uh huh //
20. and then, go to America, and live with him. That's not gonna
21. happen now. You know, we've been in care, that wasn't
22. supposed to happen, and he was supposed to marry his fiancée,
23. but they've split up, and I was supposed to go to college and
24. get a degree and then have kids, you know, but that's not gonna
25. happen. (P). Well, it's gonna happen, but it's not gonna happen
26. in that //A: Yeah// order.

Ebele's biography is scattered with examples of how plans have to be reviewed in the light of events and how alternative ways forward can be found. There is an apparent sense of fatalism in Ebele's account, particularly in her repetition of 'that's not gonna happen' and 'that wasn't supposed to happen' (lines 20-26). However, both here and in her overall narrative, Ebele conveys a strong sense that, whilst she has been on the receiving end of many unexpected and unwanted life events, she is an active agent who can choose alternative routes⁸. This is communicated in her final evaluation at the close of this narrative. Having outlined all the things that were 'supposed to happen' but did not, she turns this

⁸ She does this at other points in the interview through the use of two metaphors: 'You've been given your cards. Play them', and, 'There are many roads to Rome'.

round in the final statement that it will happen, but not in the expected order. Ebele, like many young people, does not conceptualise the transition to adulthood and work as linear. She sees such an orderly route as the ideal, but uses this as a point of contrast with the reality of her experience, in which the course has been neither linear nor predictable. Thus, Ebele expresses here how she has learned to envisage multiple routes to adulthood and independence and ways to achieve these in spite of little stability or support.

Some young women who had been in care felt that they were less likely to have a termination than those who had not. The following discussion between Sam and a project worker began with Sam stating that young women in care were less likely to have abortions because they did not face parental pressure either to have an abortion or to push them towards education.

Group Three

1. PW Do you think there's any other reasons why young people in
2. care might not have abortions, other than that pressure bit? =
- 3.
4. Sam = Cos it's somebody to love, innit. It's summat of your own,
5. it's summat to protect and that. Summat you've got to be there
6. (...)//Anna: (unclear) // Yeah.
- 7.
8. PW That's why I was asking, 'cos I know I've heard that, what
9. you were saying - people saying that before. (p). I think
10. that's quite significant, what you just said.
- 11.
12. Sam I just thought, 'Bastard, I'm pregnant!'
13. [Laughter]

We see here how participants may suggest reasons, within a public narrative, of why *others* might decide for or against termination, but then contrast this with their own accounts. Here, Sam provides an emotional rationale for why care

leavers might be more likely than others to continue with pregnancy, then distances herself from this and from the project worker's theory, in the final clause, 'I just thought, 'Bastard, I'm pregnant!' This seems to be a sudden switch, following several minutes spent describing reasons why care leavers might choose to continue with pregnancy. It appears to be due to a change in the discursive resources that Sam is drawing on, from talking about 'care leavers' as a category, to talking explicitly about her own reaction. This can be seen as a means of resisting notions of consciously planned pregnancy, which implies that the reasons she has previously outlined do not apply to her. There are, however, alternative interpretations for this response. It can be seen as a way of 'back-tracking' from her previous remarks about having 'someone to love', which, in the context of a group interview, might be over-exposing. Alternatively, it can be seen as a way of refuting the leading comments of the project worker.

Overall, four participants who described their pregnancies as unplanned gave emotional reasons for continuing with pregnancy⁹. All four were care leavers. In the following group discussion, several participants discuss their reactions to pregnancy and their differing reasons for continuing with it. Immediately preceding this, the group had been discussing abortion, and Monica had stated that she had seriously considered having one.

Group Five

- | | | |
|----|--------|---|
| 1. | Kirsty | I didn't feel like that, though, I, I wanted it for the |
| 2. | | comfort. I was like = |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | Monica | = Oh, I was scared stiff. |
| 5. | | |
| 6. | Kirsty | I mean, I was happy. When I found out I was only 16, |

⁹ This is in addition to Nazia's description of a 'planned' pregnancy: see page 127.

7. and still at school and that, but I thought, I've got that
8. comfort there. No one can take that baby away from
9. me. She's mine. No matter what.
10.
11. Monica Well I thought my Granddad was gonna kick me out.
12.
13. Alison What do you mean about 'comfort'?
14.
15. Kirsty I don't know. When you're in care, you, you lose the
16. comfort.
17. [You feel
18. Christine
19. you're on your own, don't you?
20. [Yeah.
21. Kirsty

The contrasting experiences of Kirsty and Monica illustrate the diversity of responses to pregnancy, as well as the specific circumstances of young women in care. Kirsty's remark that 'no one can take that baby away from me' is interesting considering that she returned to the children's home after childbirth for a few weeks, but wanted to move out as soon as possible for fear of her parenting being assessed and being found inadequate. This notion that a child was 'something of one's own' is also found in several accounts.

As we have seen, most participants were initially shocked or surprised to find that they were pregnant and most considered having a termination. This was a difficult process for some, but unplanned pregnancies cannot be assumed to be unwanted. Even those who had initially been upset and frightened by pregnancy often changed how they felt in the following weeks, as they made changes in their material circumstances and their conception of their imagined futures. Many felt differently by the time of the birth of their child and stressed that, despite initial doubts, their child was wanted.

BREAKING THE NEWS: PREGNANCY IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

The reactions of women to finding that they are pregnant do not take place in social isolation, but are inextricably linked to relationships with others. As Woollett and Marshall (2000) argue,

Models of pregnancy and childbirth expressed primarily in biological and depersonalized terms [...] are challenged by accounts which emphasize their psychological and social significance for women's identities, relations with partners and family members. (315)

Breaking the news to prospective fathers

Nearly all the young women were in a relationship with the baby's father when they found they were pregnant. That is, very few became pregnant as the result of a casual or one-off sexual encounter. The men's reactions varied markedly: from having encouraged pregnancy, to being surprised but happy, those that were unsure, those who favoured abortion, and those who reacted with violence.

Some prospective fathers had not wanted their partners to continue with the pregnancy, and, in two cases, presented her with a choice between the baby and the relationship. In both cases, this led to a break-up, although in one case, this was temporary. One prospective father had considered the decision about whether to have the baby not to be his concern.

There were also more coercive and exploitative elements to some relationships. In some cases, the baby's father was several years older than the mother, a factor that is rarely recognised in dominant discourses of 'teenage parenthood', in which 'boy fathers' play a role (see pages 54-7). Nazia, for example, described her

partner as 'quite a lot older than me', and as having taken advantage of her vulnerability:

Nazia

1. A So, at the time when you got pregnant had you actually
2. discussed it, or?
3.
4. N Well, he used to say he wanted me to get pregnant //A: Right //
5. But then when I was, he wasn't happy about it. //A: Oh dear.
6. Right // But I don't believe in abortions //A: Mmm// I didn't
7. really think about it properly at all //A: Mmm // I thought I
8. wanted a baby, but I didn't think of, you know, like what's
9. gonna – you know, what it involves, and all the caring and
10. everything. //A: Mmm// Um, but my son's dad knew I was er,
11. insecure at the time, so I think he took advantage really.
12.
13. A Mmm. So when you actually - when you found you were
14. pregnant, what was your reaction?
15.
16. N I was happy. //A: Uh huh// Well, I was shocked at first
17. //A: Mm// but then I was happy. //A: Yeah// And I told my
18. son's dad, and he said to get an abortion. And I told him 'no'.
19. [
20. A That must have been
21. very difficult.
22.
23. N Well, he used silly excuses like, 'Oh, it could be someone
24. else's' - which he knew it wasn't //A: Yeah// So I think it was,
25. even though he would say that he wanted - me to have a baby,
26. don't think that he really meant it. But then when I told him I
27. wasn't going to have an abortion, he came round to it.

The notion of Nazia individually and consciously 'planning' her pregnancy (see pages 124-5) is further placed in question by this segment. Contradictions and the sense of being pulled in different directions are apparent in this account of a 'planned' pregnancy, being influenced by the seemingly exploitative influence of her partner.

This is further exemplified by Sam's account of her relationship. She had described feeling like her 'head was in pieces' when she was first pregnant (see page 123). However, the following segments, one from the same group interview and one from an individual interview, place this process in rather a different context. Both suggest, in different ways, that her narrative of pregnancy was closely bound up with her relationship with the baby's father.

Sam

1. A. When you found out you were pregnant, - can you tell me a
2 bit about that?
3.
4 S Um, I'd found out he'd been sleeping with (someone else)(...)
5 Um, I'd walked out on him. I mu – must have been pregnant,
6 //A: Yeah// And er, that little tart, I mean, she were always,
7 you know, slithering round him and that. Jumped into bed wi'
8 him, when I'd left him. But I went back after a few days, like
9 //A: Yeah// And then I found out about that and, then I found
10 out I were pregnant and I just - couldn't go near him // Mm// I
11 just don't want him near me //A: Mm. Yeah// Still loved him,
12 but I couldn't bear the thought of him getting in't bed at side
13 of me or owt. I used to sleep on't floor, out of the way
14 //A: Mm // And then eventually I just left him. //A: Mm // Big
15 mistake, like, but.

Group Three

1. PW Did you think about having a termination or not?
2.
3. Sam I were desperate for one. (unclear). He says to me, he says 'I'll
4 slit your effing throat if you have an abo:rtion'.
5. (P)
6 Anna Who said that? =
7
8 Sam = And I've not seen him since!
9 [Laughter]

In the individual interview, Sam concentrates upon her *own* response to pregnancy. In the group interview, her narration of her boyfriend's threat follows a direct question concerning whether she considered an abortion. The accounts are

not contradictory but do provide quite differing narrative constructions of Sam's decisions around her pregnancy and reveal the contextual specificity of interview accounts.

As we have seen, there was a wide variety of responses from prospective fathers to finding out about the pregnancy. However, apart from the three cases mentioned above, most relationships with the babies' fathers continued past the point of early pregnancy, with young men adjusting to the idea of fatherhood¹⁰.

Breaking the news to family members

All the young women who had no care history discussed the decision to continue with the pregnancy with at least one family member. Finding they were pregnant was frequently linked in their minds with telling their mothers, as in the following story from Emma. This takes the structure of a classic narrative - that is, it is a story about a specific past event, and is characterised by temporal sequencing (Labov 1972; Riessman 1993) (see page 110). Prior to this narrative, Emma had been talking generally about having health problems during her second pregnancy.

Emma

1. A Were you – had you – had you left home at that point, or were you
2. living at your mum's?
- 3.
4. E I caught, I caught pregnant when I was still living at home. //A: Yeah//
5. It was a typical day. I was on my way to work. //A: Yeah // I was
6. working at the salon at the time. //A: Yeah// Um, the partner - you
7. know, my partner at the time, you know, I was thinking 'God, haven't
8. had my period'. I was waiting for my exam results. I can remember it

¹⁰ The stories of these relationships are further explored later in this chapter and in the subsequent two chapters.

9. as clear as it was yesterday //A: Yeah// I mean, I was waiting for my
 10. exam results, and I was thinking, 'God', you know, 'haven't had a
 11. period this month. What's happening?' [laughs] And I thought it was
 12. just the stress of my exam results. Wondering how well I'd done and
 13. that. //A: Mm// And I didn't think nothing of it. And then weeks were
 14. going by, and I'm thinking 'God', you know //A: Mm// 'I should
 15. have started by now!' Like I say, I was on my way to work, and I
 16. went back home, and I thought to myself, 'I've got to tell my mum'.
 17. //A: Yeah// You know, 'she needs to know'. //A: Yeah// 'I think I'm
 18. pregnant. I don't know, but I think so'. //A: Yeah// Um, you know. I
 19. went home, and I told her. And, she didn't, she didn't say anything
 20. really. It was my Dad who wanted me to have an abortion //A: Did
 21. he?// And I says, 'No, I'm not having it'. You know, 'I can't do that. I
 22. mean, I don't believe in it'.

In this account and several others, news of pregnancy was shared amongst family members. Emma's narrative includes her thoughts over several weeks, but marks a specific turning point - literally, as she turned back from work (lines 15-16) - when she decided that she had to talk to her mother. Whilst the young women would not necessarily take the advice of parents (as in this case), the opportunity to discuss the decision with family members was often welcomed.

The young women's accounts illustrate how the 'decision' to keep the baby cannot be divorced from a relational context, and where young women had contact with family members, their reactions to the news often formed a key part of narratives of decision-making. However, ultimately, the 'decision' *does* have major consequences for the lives of individual young women.

Yvonne

1. When she found out that I was pregnant, My mum, she said to me
 2. that I must have an abortion. And I said, I said to my mum, 'But, but
 3. hold on a minute. It's my life. It's my body. I should be making the
 4. decisions'. Because my mum never looked after me, right. Since, let
 5. me see - I've been in this country for six years now //A: Yeah?//
 6. which means that I spent about two years at my mum's house, and
 7. the rest in a children's home //A: Yeah// So it's like, my mum's
 8. never done nothing for me. She never used to look after me when I

9. was in my country. She abandoned me and my brother, so I told me
10. mum, why in the world should she tell me what to do with my body
11. right now? //A: Mm// It's me who's having the baby. It's me who's
12. going to suffer. It's not her, so she can't tell me what to do.

This segment begins as a story (lines 1-4), but quickly shifts to the main point which is a lengthy evaluation (lines 4-12) of the reasons for Yvonne's view that it is 'my life' and that her mother's opinion counts for little with her. Preparation for the birth can be a solitary experience for some women, particularly those who are, or who have recently been, in care, as can the experience of mothering. Only a quarter of the care leavers discussed their pregnancy with family members, and only one found the response positive and supportive.

The time of leaving care is often when young people try to restore relationships with their birth family, and family relationships may improve over the two years after leaving care (Biehal et al. 1995). It may be hoped, in some cases, that pregnancy and childbirth will facilitate a reconciliation. For example, Rachel said, *'Nobody, like, really cared, but I did say to Mark, 'Oh, we might all get bought back together again now, and be like a proper family'*. Biehal et al. (1995) found that this hope was sometimes fulfilled, as mothers of pregnant young women may show renewed interest in them once they were mothers. In contrast, Stein and Carey (1986) found that family separation was likely to become more lasting and entrenched once young people left care (Stein and Carey 1986). The findings of this research suggest that the reaction of family members to the pregnancy can, in some cases, add to a sense of rejection for care leavers, at least in the early stages of pregnancy. Such responses may also compound a pre-existing sense of being 'on their own' and, hence, a need to 'go it alone'.

Breaking the news to professionals

Some young women discussed the pregnancy with professionals, including social workers, leaving care workers and counsellors. This was particularly important for those with no contact with birth family. Some professionals were less judgmental than relatives were. Nicola, for example, found that the response of her social worker contrasted with the condemnatory attitude of her grandparents¹¹.

Nicola

1. I were like, on the last couple of months of my first social worker,
2. //A: Yeah// And I thought, 'Oh God, she's gonna hit the roof! She's
3. gonna hit the roof!' [laughs] Then like I told her, and she says,
4. 'Right, well, you're pregnant. (p) You obviously didn't want an
5. abortion, cos you're passed your dates, so we'll now deal with it',
6. and I were like – 'No lectures?' She says 'No lectures. You're not
7. the first, and you certainly won't be the last', and - I mean, they
8. were brilliant.

However, some young women in care (or after care) felt that social workers had been less than supportive and judged them to be unsuitable mothers even in the early stages of pregnancy. For example, Nazia described how, '*before I even had him, social services were thinking of putting him on the child protection register*'. Justine, also a care leaver, described total breakdown in her relationship with her social worker following the news of her pregnancy. This formed a pivotal point in her story of caring for a disabled child with insufficient professional support:

Justine

1. J I had to go through a lot of things as I were pregnant //A: Yeah//
2. cos of Social Services. [Clears throat] My social worker wasn't
3. too happy about it, cos I were - 16, just going on 17 at that point
4. //A: Uh huh// And er, she says I either - have an abortion or else
5. baby'll get taken off me. We never got on – very well.

¹¹ Nicola's mother had died and she had no contact with her father.

6.
7. A How did you feel - about that, when she said that?
8.
9. J I put a complaint in.//A: Mm// And then after that we had no
10. contact whatsoever.

Such reactions by professionals were almost exclusively experienced by care leavers. Certainly, only young women who were, or had been, in care felt that they were the subjects of child protection concerns *prior to* the baby's birth. Those who included an element in their stories of professionals expressing child protection concerns during pregnancy were often those who later became the focus of child protection investigations, or who had a heightened awareness of the possibility of such concerns in relation to their mothering.

LATER STAGES OF PREGNANCY: CHANGE AND ADJUSTMENT

The months of pregnancy were frequently characterised by considerable change, not always directly related to pregnancy. Some young women sat exams and most moved home at least once. There were also changes directly related to pregnancy and preparation for mothering, including lifestyle changes, shifts in identity and the acquisition of childcare skills. It is only by appreciating the complexity of these changes that a full contextualisation of the young women's lives can be grasped. That is, their stories of being pregnant are not only about preparation for mothering; they are about being young women negotiating adverse circumstances.

Housing transitions

Whilst some young women were settled with foster parents or in their own accommodation when they became pregnant, half moved during pregnancy, some several times. Seven were homeless during pregnancy, five staying in hostels and

two with friends. Moves were particularly numerous for care leavers, as might be expected given the high rate of homelessness amongst this group (Biehal et al. 1995; Stein and Wade 2000). However, moves were not restricted to this group, and of the eight non-care leavers, only two had not moved by the time of childbirth. This is unsurprising given that some participants were contacted through a project for young people at risk of homelessness. However, previous research suggests that most young mothers move during pregnancy or in the first year of motherhood (Allen and Bourke-Dowling 1998). Furthermore, youth homelessness has risen sharply since the 1970s (Furlong and Cartmel 1997), with an estimated one in five 16-24 year olds experiencing homelessness (SEU 2000).

Housing moves were influenced by both 'pull' and 'push' factors. 'Pull' factors included wanting to leave care or the parental home and set up independently. For those living with one or both parents, 'push' factors included overcrowding, arguments, being 'thrown out' of home by parents, and fleeing violence. For those in care, they included the breakdown of foster placements, residential placements being considered unsuitable for pregnant young women, and having to leave because of 'causing trouble'.

Those who were asked to leave residential care when they became pregnant often felt the choices offered were not real options, particularly when these included hostel accommodation or 'going home'. For most, neither of these felt practical. They would only enter a hostel as a last resort, because of fears about their own safety and of taking a baby into a hostel environment. They were particularly worried about drug-users and residents involved in criminal activities, from whom

they clearly differentiated themselves in ways which were often unappreciated by professionals. Neither did returning to the parental home feel possible. The three who were advised to 'go home' had all been in residential care for several years. Of the young women who returned to live with their parents during pregnancy or immediately after childbirth, only one stayed longer than a few weeks, and she was not a care leaver but had been living with a violent partner. In three cases, 'push' factors appear to have precipitated them into living with a boyfriend.

Three of those who had to leave care due to pregnancy were 16 at the time, and one only 15. They felt that they had not 'left' so much as having been *kicked out* of care. Both Jan and Ruth had committed criminal offences, had a history of school non-attendance and of running away from care, and both felt that residential staff saw them as 'trouble'. Jan described this as due to her running away and also to the lack of suitable accommodation for pregnant teenagers.

Jan

1. A When you, when you were first pregnant were you, is that after
2. you'd left care?
- 3.
4. J No, I was still in residential homes. //A: Right// Um, and they –
5. they, they just basically said like, 'Your bed's closing in two week.
6. It's not, it's not, er, appropriate to have a pregnant – a pregnant
7. girl in here. You either go home or whatever', so I ended up
8. whatevering and going [laughing] from place to place, really.

Jan did go home to her parents for a short period but, having been in care for several years, she described herself as not being able to 'stick to their rules'. Both Jan and Ruth faced a period of homelessness during pregnancy as a result of losing their residential placements. Jan was eventually housed in an unfamiliar

area of the city, at some distance from friends and family. Ruth, who was 15, remained on a care order, although she was no longer in residential care:

Ruth

1. A Where were you living at that time?
- 2.
3. R Er, anywhere [laughs] =
- 4.
5. A = Anywhere? =
- 6.
7. R Yeah.

Both Jan and Ruth returned later in their narratives to this point of being ‘kicked out of care’ as a key moment. Both young women were also later the focus of child protection concerns, in part due to their histories of offending and ‘trouble’.

As we have seen, for most young women, pregnancy was a very unsettled time of physical transition from one place of accommodation to another. By the time they gave birth, most were more settled, whilst some moved in the final stages of pregnancy or left hospital with a baby to go into new accommodation.

Changes in heterosexual relationships

For some, late pregnancy was characterised by changes in their relationship with the baby’s father, and some relationships broke down at this time. In two cases, young women described partners being violent during pregnancy. In both cases, this led the young women to stay with their birth families although, in Yvonne’s case, this was very short-term:

Yvonne

1. His dad dad beat me up when I was pregnant with him. It was me,
2. and, another girl who was pregnant for him as well. He tried beating
3. us up, both up at the same time, like to get the babies out of us.

We saw earlier that the fathers of the children of 'teenage mothers' may be assumed to be 'boy fathers'. Another assumption is that the children's fathers should be involved more in the upbringing of their children. The violence of some prospective fathers during pregnancy suggests that this may not always be appropriate. Also, as we shall see later¹², experience of male violence was not restricted to pregnancy. As with all domestic violence, this aspect of young women's relationships appears to be hidden from public view and particularly from popular narratives of lone motherhood.

As well as these two cases, four other young women split up with the father of their baby during the pregnancy for other reasons, including infidelity and arguments. However, the majority of young women were still in a relationship with the baby's father at the time of the child's birth.

Change during pregnancy: lifestyle change or moral redemption?

Pregnancy was often a time of identity transition as young women adjusted to take on the role of mother. The stories often contradict popular discourses which equate young mothers with irresponsibility (due to their status as adolescents and having unplanned pregnancies) or with selfishness (due to their decision to become mothers with few material or familial resources). For example, Sam described having 'got her head round it' after initial shock. This was also the case for others. Trish, for example, was initially frightened but, after talking to her parents, adjusted to the idea of pregnancy, and was 'fine after a bit'.

¹² See pages 212-3

For a few participants, the day-to-day reality of what is involved in being a mother did not sink in during their pregnancy, as is suggested by the following comments:

Rachel

1. A How did you feel about, when you were – when you were heavily
2. pregnant, how did you feel about, er, the fact that you were going
3. to become a mum?
- 4.
5. R It didn't really cli:ck. I didn't really realise //A: Yeah// I just
6. thought, 'Oh, babies are great', you know. //A: Yeah// You don't
7. realise that, you need the money.

This could be interpreted as denial or ignorance of the realities of mothering. However, given that, during her pregnancy, Rachel had to deal with health problems, difficulties in her relationship with her baby's father and homelessness, she was not really in a position to consider in detail the realities of motherhood. Arguments about a 'culture of poverty' fail to take account of the fact that, 'some people have neither the material resources to plan effectively nor realistic options for which to plan' (McMahon 1995: 101). Also, women *with* material resources may be unaware of the realities of mothering (Barclay et al. 1997; Miller 2000), but the consequences are different for them.

For some, pregnancy was a time to acquire new skills. Though many had previous childcare experience through looking after siblings, a few did not. Nazia and Naseem both spent time during pregnancy learning childcare skills at a family centre, which they described as invaluable. In the context of their narratives, these elements functioned as evidence of their commitment and knowledge of childcare.

For many, however, pregnancy was a time of personal adjustment in preparation for their new role. Karen, asked what her pregnancy was like, described it as a

time of gradual realization of the responsibility to come:

Karen

1. Pregnancy, really, kind of, you know, brought me (...) to reality, I
2. guess. Or maybe I had to grow up //A: Right// very quickly (...)
3. Yea:h, I think it was that. It was like, going from having no kind of
4. worries and //A: Uh huh// yeah, just being a child, I guess, really
5. //A:Uh huh// and then suddenly, you know, I was in a situation where
6. I was pregnant //A: Uh huh// and rea:lis:ing how serious that was, and
7. it was going to affect, kind of, the rest of my life. //A: Mm// I wasn't
8. just thinking about me now. I was thinking about another person.

This excerpt is fairly unusual, in that Karen relates her feelings about being pregnant at 16 to youth and 'growing up'. One reason for this may be that Karen is looking back over a longer time period than most participants, as her son was 5-years old. However, her commentary is really an example of a narrative of 'becoming responsible', in which the young women talk about becoming a mother as a process of having to think about others rather than themselves. Such comments were much more commonly articulated in relation to motherhood, but also form part of the pregnancy narratives of some participants, particularly those who talked about making significant change during pregnancy.

In addition to practical preparation, some participants reported making significant lifestyle changes during pregnancy. The theme of moral reform, or 'narratives of redemption', has been previously noted, particularly in relation to young working-class mothers (McMahon 1995; Davies et al. 2001). Two young women stated that they had previously tended to get into fights but, when pregnant, made sure they kept out of trouble. Some participants had spent a lot of time socialising prior to pregnancy and, while a minority continued to do so, most said they stopped going out at night during pregnancy. Others, such as Yvonne, had been regular

drug-users prior to pregnancy:

Yvonne

1. When I was in school, before I got pregnant, I was into serious
2. drugs. //A: Uh huh// And like, that's one of the reasons why I never
3. went to school 'cos it was the drugs more important than school.
4. //A: Mm// But when I got pregnant, that's when I said to myself,
5. 'No. I'm having a baby now' //A: Yeah// So all of this need to stop. I
6. said to myself, 'if I'm having a baby, the baby has to come out
7. perfect. I don't want the baby to be sickly, because I'll be blaming
8. myself for the rest of my life, saying, 'This is what I did to the baby.
9. I used to smoke this, and that's why the baby's like that'. //A: Mm// I
10. didn't want to have that guilty conscience on my head. So
11. everything that I was doing, I completely stopped it. Once I found
12. out I was pregnant, I stopped everything. I even stopped smoking.

This is another (particularly dramatic) example of a narrative of 'becoming responsible'. Yvonne draws a vivid contrast between her drug habit before she became pregnant, and her decision to ensure the health of her baby through giving up drugs during pregnancy. This was also the case for Sam, who stopped taking heroin during pregnancy. Asked if she had thought about having a baby before she found that she was pregnant, she replied:

Sam

- 1 S I were only 17 then. I were just, doing my teenage thing. //A: Yeah//
- 2 but no, definitely didn't want kids [laughs]. That weren't on't agenda.
- 3 You know what I mean? [laughs]. //A: Mm. Mm// I didn't want tying
- 4 down and that. //A: Mm// But, I'd have probably been dead anyway,
- 5 if it weren't for having her.
- . .
- 6 A Mm. Is that one of the reasons you moved?
- 7
- 8 S Yeah, I mean, it's just as bad in't city, but at least it's not people I
- 9 know that's on it in the city, is it? //A: Yeah// Not having to see like,
- 10 friends and that, totally destroyed by it.
- 11
- 12 A Mmm. Yeah. You think it would have destroyed you?
- 13
- 14 S Oh aye. I would have got bad on it. I know I would have, like

15 everybody else, in't it? //A: Mm// But, I got pregnant, luckily
16 enough, and had her. That's it.

Whilst Sam saw her pregnancy as marking a major turning point in her life, indeed, as saving her life, it is interesting to consider further how she conceptualised this, not in terms of personal change, but as change necessitated by the inevitable responsibility of motherhood.

Sam

1. A Yeah. Sounds like you had quite a big change in you, as well,
2. did it? Cos you said like, you were on drugs before, and then
3. you...
4. [
4. S Not really. Being on drugs has got nowt to do with your
5. personality, has it? //A: No, no// It's just you prefer to be out
6. of your head. //A: Yeah// And I had no responsibilities or
7. owt, so //A: Yeah// didn't hurt nowt, did it?
8.
9. A Yeah. That was all I meant, really, that, I was just wondering
10. if it, kind of - just changed your lifestyle a bit.
11.
12. S Oh, it definitely changed my lifestyle. God, yeah. Well, it
13. does, doesn't it, with anybody.

This is interesting as an example of the co-construction of accounts. Sam contradicts what she sees as my assumption that the change in her lifestyle marked a *personal* change. At this point, I am slightly thrown by the strength of her denial, leading me to make a rather leading comment (lines 9-10), but one which is productive in allowing Sam to confirm her understanding that imminent motherhood leads *all* women to lifestyle change. This shows that Sam sees the changes she made as a normal and natural part of pregnancy, rather than as specific to being a 'teenager'.

For many participants, then, pregnancy led to significant changes in lifestyle and priorities. For others, the reality of their prospective motherhood did not really sink in. These young women were more likely to emphasise the changes brought about by motherhood itself. These realities and the consequent taking on of responsibility are the focus of the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the young women's stories from early to late pregnancy. These accounts demonstrate the diversity of young women's reactions to, and experiences of, pregnancy. In addition, their accounts lead to a questioning of any clear division between 'planned' and 'unplanned' pregnancies, and many either gradually adjusted to their new role or were happy to be pregnant even where they had not planned it.

However, it can be said that, for the majority, pregnancy was characterised by an initial point of crisis, or at least by the negotiation of a key 'narrative turning point' in their lives. Consequently, a process of adjustment marks initial stages of pregnancy. Whilst this is likely to be true of all women, for the majority of participants it was not something they had imagined as part of their teenage years and it therefore required some adjustment in lifestyle, identity and home environment. Some told 'narratives of redemption', in which they reported making major lifestyle or personal changes during later stages of pregnancy.

These accounts also show how it is important to take account of the social, cultural and biographical circumstances in which women become pregnant.

Women's experiences of pregnancy and childbirth are social and relational (Woollett and Marshall 1997), and most young women discussed their pregnancy with other people. This almost always included the baby's father, although this elicited various responses including happiness and support, indifference and violence. Some discussed the pregnancy with their birth family, but care leavers were less likely to do so and less likely to find the reaction to be supportive. They were also more likely to be the focus of child protection concerns before the birth of the child.

Many of the themes introduced here will be returned to since they have implications for later stages of the young women's stories. For example, those who did not discuss their pregnancy with family members were often those for whom motherhood was a particularly 'lone' experience. Also, those who described themselves as having been 'in trouble' when in care tended later to become the focus of child protection concerns, due at least in part to their histories of offending. Finally, the themes of change, adjustment, and 'moral redemption' through motherhood are continued, being a particularly strong feature of accounts of the initial stages of motherhood.

Chapter Five

Becoming a Mother

I completely changed... Things that were important then weren't important any more. (Karen)

This chapter takes up the young women's stories from the point of childbirth and through the first few months of motherhood. It begins to explore the meanings the young women give to the experience of becoming mothers. Like the previous one, it follows a chronological structure, in order to describe the process over time, to show the links the young women make in their stories between events, and to capture some of the complexity of their accounts. Some of the diversity between accounts is also presented, particularly through the presentation of accounts of motherhood as difficult or traumatic, and others of motherhood as more straightforward and enjoyable than anticipated.

The chapter begins with a description of the first few days of motherhood. It then describes the transitions in the young women's lives in the early weeks of motherhood, including housing transitions. However, the transition to motherhood is not only material but is a major transformation of everyday life and identity. Whilst the young women's accounts of becoming mothers are in many respects similar to those of other mothers, there are different in important aspects. Crucially, although the young women discuss some of the difficulties they face, young mothers have to claim the identity of 'mother', and therefore construct narratives that position themselves as 'good-enough mothers'.

Whilst some found adjusting to motherhood difficult, it should not be assumed that young women necessarily have more difficulties than older women in this regard. The presentation of the stories of *young* mothers is particularly sensitive, since there is a danger of interpreting talk of difficulties as being peculiar to them, rather than being a feature of many women's accounts. In fact, there is some evidence to contradict the view that young mothers find the adjustment to motherhood particularly difficult (Phoenix 1991a,b). A number of participants had previous experience of childcare, or had taken childcare courses at college. Others, who had initially been shocked and upset by the pregnancy, felt they had adjusted during pregnancy and had felt prepared for the reality of motherhood once it came. There was also considerable diversity in the group of 'young mothers'. They were aged from 14 and 20. Some had more extensive support networks than others. Many had partners, despite their status as 'unmarried teenage mothers'. Some also appear to have had more emotional resources than others. It cannot be assumed that being a mother when comparatively young is inherently problematic nor a homogenous experience.

FROM CHILDBIRTH TO HOME

The first few days of motherhood

Just as reactions to pregnancy amongst the young women were extremely varied, so were experiences of childbirth, and one might reasonably expect this from the accounts of childbirth amongst any group of women. For a minority, the experience was very frightening, either because they did not know what to expect or because of a particularly difficult labour. Others stated that they would never go through it again because of the pain and trauma, whilst a third group claimed to

have enjoyed giving birth. This range of experiences seems strikingly ordinary and no different from what might be expected from mothers of all ages.

Their experience of support available from hospital staff following birth also varied. Some, particularly those who felt under-confident or lacking in childcare skills found particular staff members very helpful. Others, who felt they knew what to do, felt either dictated to or patronised by nursing staff. The following segment from a group interview was initiated by a question about whether they felt others responded differently to them as young mothers:

Group Two

1. Julie The day when I was ready to go home and there was a nurse,
2. like, working at the hospital, on the ward. She didn't think I
3. was ready to go home, because she didn't think I knew how
4. to bath him, and //A: Right// I was like, 'I've looked after
5. God knows how many kids in my life'. But apart from that, I
6. haven't really had anybody.
- 7.
8. Alison Did you feel ready to go home? Did you feel prepared?
- 9.
10. Julie Yeah, I wanted to go home. //A: Yeah. Yeah// I hated being
11. in that place. I really hated it. I knew I was ready to go home.
- 12.
13. Alison Right.
- 14.
15. Trish They do though. When I was going to bath Jason for the first
16. time it was like, 'Oh, oh, you can't bath him on your own.
17. I'll go down with you'. And like, I'd bathed twins.

As this extract demonstrates, it cannot be assumed that youth equals inexperience. Many, like Trish, had prior experience of looking after younger siblings or relatives, and three participants had studied for vocational qualifications¹ in

¹ NVQ or BTEC

Health and Social Care. This may place in question the assumption of a fixed relationship between age, competence and responsibility.

Some participants also complained of patronising comments from doctors or nurses concerning use of contraception. The following comments from Trish followed a question about what it was like in hospital:

Trish

1. When I first had him, I mean, the doctor come round, all, with all
2. the students, um, 'You're going to use contraception, aren't you?
3. It's not gonna happen again?' and all this lot. But it was
4. //A: How did you feel about that?// awful, because he brought all
5. the students with him when he was saying this, you know what I
6. mean? //A: Right// It made me feel um, like, (p) oh, I don't know.
7. (p) Just made me feel small.

Here, Trish describes how, even at the point of childbirth, there was an assumption by medical staff that the birth of her child was a mistake. There also appears to be an assumption that Trish was lacking either in knowledge of contraception or in sufficient responsibility to use it. This perception of being patronised was accentuated for some of those who had been in care. For example, Kirsty stated, *'in hospital you feel like, 'Oh, she's in care. We'd better watch (...) more closely''*. This is, of course, a description of how Kirsty *felt*, rather than direct evidence that she was treated as a greater risk to her child than other mothers. However, this was also the perception of many other care leavers.

Going 'home' with a baby

Most of the young women were very pleased to leave hospital having given birth. However, they were returning to a variety of circumstances, some more secure than others. Only one young woman, Kirsty, returned to a children's home, and

this was just for six weeks. Nearly a third were living alone with their baby at this time. Another eight were living with the baby and the baby's father. Two were living with a partner who was not the baby's biological father. A further five were living with one or both parents, and five were in residential care, foster care, or supported lodgings.

For those who made their first move to independence after giving birth, the most successful tended to be moves that were gradual and were planned in advance. This allowed them to leave care as a process, rather than as an event, and they tended to feel more positive about the accommodation offered, instead of perceiving it to be the only option. Successful moves were often supported by a partner or friend, as in the following example:

Kirsty

1. A And how did you feel about, er, about moving into a flat?
- 2.
3. K Really, I wanted to do it, you know, before the baby was born. I
- 4 just, //A: Yeah// but, it was like, I just wanna see what it's like to live
- 5 by myself. //A: Yeah// I just want to be by myself. But - in the end,
- 6 it was just too much. I just couldn't be bothered with it, anyway, I
- 7 just, everything was set up at the Home, all the Moses basket //A:
- 8 Yeah// and everything was done. //A: Yeah// So I just ended up
- 9 staying there.
- 10 .
- 11 .
- 12 (My best friend) moved in with me as well. //A: Oh right//. You
- 13 know, just so I could get used to being there. //A: Yeah// So she
- 14 stayed for like, two, three weeks. //A: Yeah// But in the end it was,
- 15 you know, it was lovely to be by myself with the baby. //A: Yeah//
- 16 And everything was settled and stuff. //A: Yeah// I loved it.

Kirsty's narrative contains a sense of having options and personal agency. She had wanted to try living by herself but, when it became clear that it was too much at once, she was able to take the option of adjusting more gradually, through the

support of the children's home and of a friend. By the time she was living alone with her baby, this felt like a positive experience.

Others who moved to independence after the birth found it difficult. Emma, who moved into a council house after the birth of her son, enjoyed the independence. However, her story, as told in the following narrative, is one of learning to manage independently with a house and a child, and finding this, at times, a struggle.

Emma

1. When I went home it – I mean, it was nice to have my own space.
2. Um, come and go as I please, sort of thing. //A: Yeah// It was a big
3. change from being at home. You know, your mum was always there
4. for you. //A: Yeah// When you've got your own house, you know,
5. you've got to do everything yourself. I mean, my mum was only
6. living up the road, before she moved. //A: Yeah// I mean, she lived
7. there for - about a year and a half, and then she moved. //A: Yeah// I
8. mean, I'd always got, always got her there, but - it was different. //A:
9. Mmm// You was on your own. //A: Mmm// I'd, you know, got the ex-
10. partner there. //A: Uh huh// He was there for me but - it's different.
11. You know, when you're living at home, with your mum, and then -
12. you've got your own house, your own bills to pay, you're thinking
13. 'God!' You've got a new baby. //A: Yeah// You know, you're
14. thinking, 'God!' you know, 'What's hit me?' //A: Mm// What's
15. happening?' [laughs] //A: Mm// But you learn to cope. That's
16. just the way it is.

Emma conveys strongly a sense of shock at the reality of independence with little support. She firstly states the positive aspects of independence, but this is very brief compared with her subsequent description of the shock of having to cope alone. Furthermore, Emma also states that she did have sources of support, but repeatedly emphasises that it is 'different' when you have your own house and child. The realisation of being on her own is emphasised through repetition of 'God!' at three different points. In the resolution to the narrative, Emma appears

to point to the transitory nature of her difficulties: 'But you learn to cope'. Women who experience difficulties in the transition to motherhood may be more able to voice them retrospectively, once they have been overcome, and they have 'learnt to cope' (Miller 2000). This may also be part of Emma's tendency to try to frame her life and her future in positive terms, involving frequent repetition of 'you've got to think positive'.

Emma's narrative is one both of moving to independence, and of the consequences of this for her at a time when she was adjusting to motherhood. It therefore illustrates how the adjustments that the young women had to make were both material (learning to cope with a house and to budget) and bound up with notions of self and identity. The next section explores the latter aspects in detail.

IDENTITY AND TRANSITION: BECOMING A MOTHER

We saw in the previous chapter how some young women made major changes in their lives and their priorities during pregnancy. Others stated that 'reality' only hit them once they gave birth, when they felt quite different about themselves and their lives. Studies of 'becoming a mother' reveal that this transition is difficult for many women (see pages 73-5). Indeed, Woollett and Marshall note that, 'a significant proportion of women are still experiencing physical and psychological problems months after delivery' (2000: 315). According to Barclay et al. (1997), women's accounts of becoming mothers have the following key features: the realisation of the reality of motherhood; feeling drained by new demands; feeling 'alone' and unsupported; experiencing a sense of 'loss'; feeling unready; and finally a stage of 'working it out', during which mothers develop new skills and

confidence. All of these difficulties and their resolutions were expressed at various times by the mothers in this study.

However, there were additional features reported by the participants beyond those suggested by previous research (such as Barclay et al. 1997; Miller 2000). Firstly, a few described feeling very different more or less instantly after giving birth, so that it was not so much a process of ‘becoming a mother’ as a sudden realisation that they were mothers. These, then, are narratives of *transformation*, rather than transition. Although McMahon (1995) describes women feeling transformed through motherhood, she discusses this as a process of personal growth and development, rather than a sudden change, as described by young women in this study. Secondly, the young women tended to connect some aspects of the process of ‘becoming a mother’ to other aspects of identity, particularly to youth. The sense of loss described by some is predominantly loss of a ‘youthful’ lifestyle. Thus, although a sense of loss may be widespread amongst new mothers, it takes particular forms here. Thirdly, a considerable number of participants reported finding the transition to ‘becoming a mother’ generally unproblematic. This has been the finding of some previous studies of young mothers (Phoenix 1991a; Schofield 1994). Nevertheless, given that teenagers are frequently expected to have added difficulties in adjusting to, and coping with, motherhood, this is a significant finding.

Realisation or transformation?

A few participants stated that it took a while for it to really sink in that they were mothers. For example, Karen, asked how she felt initially, commented,

Karen

1. I don't really think it sunk in. I had this baby, and I couldn't
2. believe it was mine, really. I think it took, yeah, quite a few
3. weeks for it to really sink in that I had a little, a little child. //A:
4. Yeah// But yeah, it was nice.

Whilst Karen describes this process of 'realising', she sees this as a predominantly positive experience, in contrast to the emphasis of Barclay et al. (1997) on the adjustment period as traumatic. Indeed, others described this response of 'realising' as a positive transformation in how they thought about themselves and their lives, which they linked to 'growing up'. Rachel and Nicola both presented such narratives of transformation:

Rachel

1. I were really, like, mardy² and - a person that liked to run about.
2. //A: Yeah// And then when Amy come along, like, < everything
3. just like – it were as if, it were just a big click > and everything
4. like, 'Ooh, I'm a mum now. That's it'.

This short segment summarises a key theme of Rachel's overall narrative of 'becoming a mother': of change, maturity and 'settling down' as a result of motherhood. Elsewhere in the interview, she describes how, in her early teenage years, she would get into minor trouble, described as liking to 'run about'. This involved playing practical jokes, drinking alcohol, 'cadging fags' off strangers, and telling 'sick jokes'. The key feature of 'running about' amongst her peer group was that these activities are not determined by routine or 'responsibility'. Once Rachel became a mother, none of this appealed to her. Within the terms of her narrative, this was not so much a 'transition' to motherhood, as an identity transformation.

² 'Mardy' is a word used in areas of the Midlands and North of England, meaning (i) spoilt (when referring to a child), or (ii) irritable (HarperCollins 1994).

In the following extract, Nicola also describes a sudden change after giving birth:

Nicola

1. A How did you feel about - when you found out you were pregnant?
2.
3. N [Exhales]. At the time, it wasn't a baby, it was someone to love. If
4. you get – that might sound, like, daft or something, but, I mean =
5.
6. A = No, not at all.
7. [
8. I'd just lost my mum like, three years earlier, and, in and
9. out of care, me dad had been violent like, all while we were growing
10. up, and, //A: Yeah// at the time, I just thought, 'Oh yeah! I've got a
11. baby!' [with sense of relief] You know what I mean? 'I've got
12. somebody to look after, and I can be like how my mum was with
13. me', and //A: Yeah// that's really how I looked at it, and then like,
14. when I had him, I were like - 'Shit! [laughing] This is a baby!' You
15. know what I mean? But it did make me realise. You know what I
16. mean? And like, as soon as I had him, 'cos everyone says 'Oh, try
17. and have him adopted or - 'cos I didn't say nothing 'til I were passed
18. my abortion date, 'cos I knew everyone'd be out to... //A: Right//
19. And I just says 'No. He's my baby, and he's, he's staying that way'.
20.
21. A So you felt like that - all the way through?
22. [
23. N Yeah. Like I said, all the way through my
24. pregnancy he were just there, you know what I mean? I just thought
25. 'Oh, I'm having a baby'. [laughs]. But once he were there, it were
26. different. Very different.
27. .
28. .
29. I can't describe it. I - don't know. It's just something clicked, and I
30. were like, 'Oh. God! I've got to be responsible for this person
31. now'(...) I can't – describe - how it felt. It were - I don't know.
32. From all of a sudden just having this big bulge, and thinking, 'Oh
33. brilliant. It's a baby' [said in matter-of-fact tone] [laughs] And him
34. actually being there, it's just, I don't know. It's brilliant [laughs]. It's,
35. it's a really good feeling.

Nicola outlines her reasons for wanting to keep her child in terms of her biography - of disruption and violence on the one hand, and of the loss of her mother on the other. She then draws another contrast between her happiness at her pregnancy and her comprehension of the reality of motherhood after the birth

(‘Shit! This is a baby’). This does not appear to be a negative realisation as she is describing a shift from thinking about the baby in terms of possession to recognition of his separate existence at birth. Furthermore, the story was told with humour and Nicola conveys her realisation of the necessity of being responsible for another being. Both Nicola and Rachel describe it as a particularly sudden identity shift, which can be seen as a ‘narrative turning point’ (Miller 2000; 87).

Some young women had been ‘in trouble’ prior to becoming mothers. We have already seen how some participants emphasised lifestyle changes during pregnancy. Others told similar ‘narratives of redemption’ (McMahon 1995) in relation to motherhood itself. That is, they described the change as a gradual process made once they had given birth. For example, both Ruth and Jan described offending behaviour prior to motherhood, and both described stopping this and moving to another district away from peers once they became mothers.

Ruth

1 A How would you compare - your life now, to how it was before you
2 had Kelly?

3

4 R Er, I think it's a lot better now, really. [P] Cos like, if I didn't have
5 Kelly then, and Hannah, I'd be locked up [laughs]

.

.

6 A Yeah? (p) You'd have carried on =

7

8 R = Going down the same path, digging a hole deeper. Yeah.

At another point, Ruth described having difficulties coping when her first daughter was young and her partner was in prison. Asked whether she had received support from social services, she replied that she did, but that, ‘they just wanted to take her’, because they were concerned about Ruth’s offending history:

Ruth

1. R They wanted to keep a close eye on us and that, to make sure we
2. weren't going out doing crime while we've got a little kid.
- 3.
4. //A: Yeah// But that all stopped when I had Kelly.
- 5.
6. A Did that change things for you?
- 7.
8. R Yeah [laughs]. Cos you don't have time to yourself, do you, when
9. You've got a kid. //A: Yeah// Your day's (roped) round them.

In Ruth's eyes, then, she simply no longer had the time for crime. Jan similarly stopped offending when she had her children, and links this firmly to the notion of responsibility. Prior to the following excerpt, she had been drawing a contrast between her behaviour and lifestyle in the present, and how she used to behave when younger and involved in illegal activities.

Jan

1. A So when you became a mum was that, was that when – d'you
2. think that changed things?
- 3.
4. J Yeah, because then you've got - I don't know. I don't know how to
5. explain it. You're a mum, aren't you. It's different. It's different to being
6. a teenager and running round. <You have to - you have responsibility.
7. You can't stop out all night.> You can't be - if I got arrested who'd
8. have my kids? I don't want my kids in a police station. //A: Yeah//
9. D'you know? I, like, watch people and they've got kids and they go to
10. prison. I don't want anybody else bringing my kids up. I (had) my kids.
11. I'll look after my kids. You don't go to prison when you've got kids.
12. //A: Mm// Like - that's why I made the decision to move as well 'cos I
13. needed to get out o't crowd. //A: Yeah// I needed to get out o't crowd
14. d'you know, that I were in, 'cos I would have ended up in trouble.
15. There were, like, drugs floating about, and the like. //A: Yeah// I
16. nee:ded to be away. I nee:ded to make a fresh start.

Here, we see how Jan describes the changes she made when she became a mother in terms of her responsibilities to her children. She initially draws a contrast between what 'being a teenager' allowed her to do and being a mother. She describes the change in her behaviour in terms of necessity (lines 5-8), but

then makes a contrast between herself and people who have 'got kids and they go to prison'. For Jan, the bottom line is that, 'you don't go to prison when you've got kids'.

The profound shift in identity described by Rachel and Nicola, and the major lifestyle changes described by Ruth and Jan are very similar to the 'redemption' stories told in the previous chapter, but are more prevalent at this point. Such stories are interesting in the light of the discursive context in which the young women became mothers. Previous research indicates a conflict, or gap, between medicalised narratives of 'becoming a mother', in which women are said to 'become' mothers through the natural process of giving birth, and women's own conceptualisation of this process of 'becoming a mother' as a longer process of adaptation to a changed social and personal identity (Woollett and Marshall 1997; Miller 2000). Miller states, 'as soon as a child is born, women are seen as mothers by all those around them. The identity of mother appears to override all others' (Miller 2000: 102). However, this appears to be the case only with women who fall within the boundaries of 'normal mothers'. For those who do not fit these categories, such as women under 20, (particularly if they are black, living in poverty, have been in care, or have a history of offending), Miller's argument does not apply. In fact, it is reversed. Rather than being 'seen as mothers by all those around them', they have to *claim* the identity of mother and to *earn the right* to be seen as mothers. This, then, makes their transition to motherhood and their narratives of this process distinctive.

For example, Rachel describes how she had wanted to show off her baby to her friends but found that they did not initially believe that she was the mother. Even more importantly, the young women felt that they had to convince professionals that they had 'become mothers', through proving their responsibility and mothering abilities. Failure to do so could lead to child protection investigations being initiated. Thus it can be argued that women can only *afford* to resist the full identity of 'mother' (as some of Miller's respondents tried to do) once they are secure in their identity as a mother. Women whose right to be mothers is challenged, such as the young women in this study, need to stake a claim to the identity of motherhood from the moment of giving birth.

Feeling alone: 'So I'll do it on my own'

A significant minority of the young women experienced the first few weeks of motherhood as particularly isolating. This accords with the finding of Barclay et al. (1997) that women often feel alone with a new baby. This is likely to be compounded for young women, due to a higher than average rate of lone motherhood³, a lack of support from some birth families, and the difficulties of living alone in contrast to the communal environment of residential care.

In the following extract, Jan describes finding it particularly difficult to adjust to motherhood, as a 16-year old lone mother, living alone in a mother and baby unit in an area where she knew no-one:

³ Eight participants were living alone with their baby in the first few weeks after giving birth. Ten were living with the baby's father or with a 'substitute' father at the time of birth. The remaining ten were living either in the family home, or in care.

Jan

1. It were like, they say, 'Oh there's support, there's this, that' but there
2. in't. There in't support when like, this babby's like, screa:ming, and it
3. won't shut up, and you can't get a bath [laughs] 'What happened?'
4. It's di:fferent when you're pregnant because, < when you're pregnant
5. you're still yoursen >. You can still get up and you can still go where
6. you want. And you have this ba:by, and - and like, you're not. This
7. little ba:by rules your life. This baby decides when you're getting a
8. bath, and you're getting up, where you're going, like. (p). And I had
9. right bad post-natal depression as well. //A: Yeah// So I ended up
10. ringing my dad up and swallowing my pride and blubbering down't
11. phone to my dad, and I went back down home, I went back home
12. for a couple of week until I sorted mesen out. //A Yeah// And then I
13. got a private landlord house down Beston, because Social wouldn't
14. help me get an house (p), so I had to get a private landlord, and then
15. that were a right dosshole and, it weren't warm enough. Daniel ended
16. up with asthma. (p) So I had to have a private - because they said, I'd
17. got a perfectly good house at Sunnington, but it were too far out. I'd
18. not got the support I needed //A: Yeah// and like, I couldn't cope.
19. Basically [laughs], it were like, I'd gone from being a single 16- year
20. old, //A: Yeah// yeah, pregnant, but I was still single, I was still
21. independent, I was still me, to like having this little - baby [laughs]
22. //A: Yeah// that ruled everything. And it were just like, //A: Yeah//
23. stuck me out in the middle of nowhere and said, 'There you go.
24. There's your house, there's your baby. Get on with it'. 'Right'.

A notable feature of this narrative is Jan's sense of a lack of adequate support, set in the context of a difficult transition to motherhood. The lack of support is described at the start of this segment, where Jan sets the scene for a long narrative of difficulties coping, combined with what she perceived to be intervention rather than help. Her narrative is also characterised by loss, evident on a number of levels. First, she describes loss of personal identity when she contrasts pregnancy with motherhood ('when you're pregnant you're still yoursen') and again towards the end of the segment ('I was still me'). Closely articulated with her loss of identity is the loss of freedom and autonomy, encapsulated in the phrases, 'This baby rules your life' and 'This little baby ruled everything'. Closely linked with these other losses is the loss of social contact and support created both by being

placed in a new area and by the everyday isolation of mothering. Jan's narrative is unusual in containing an element of social criticism, in that she does not see her isolation and difficulty coping as inevitable but as the outcome of social isolation.

However, accounts of feeling 'alone' are by no means restricted to lone mothers and being alone did not necessarily cause a sense of isolation. Kirsty described how she enjoyed her time alone with her baby as a lone mother. She commented,

Kirsty

1. People say to me, 'O:h, I don't know if I can cope. Don't know if I
2. can do this. Don't know if I can do that'. I say, 'Well, I coped. It's
3. easy. It's better. You have no-one else to worry about. Just you and
4. the baby'.

Within her overall narrative, this happy time is contrasted with her current circumstances, living with two small children and a partner.

In contrast, several participants felt 'alone' even though they were living with the baby's father. Where the father did not contribute towards childcare, they often felt they were better off being literally alone, rather than having sole responsibility for the baby's care and well-being. In several cases, this led to the break-up of the relationship during the first few months of the baby's life. During this time, the number of young mothers living with the father of their child dropped from eight to five⁴. A further three were still in relationships with the baby's fathers after the first few months, but considered themselves to be lone mothers, as the baby's father lived elsewhere and made negligible contributions to childcare. The following excerpts demonstrate this sense of being alone while in a relationship.

⁴ One father was sent to prison shortly after the birth of his child. Although the couple eventually got back together, the young woman felt that she had been a lone mother during this period. Another participant moved to live with the baby's father, having lived with her mother in the initial period after the birth.

Nicola

1. We stayed together until Jamie were about - four, maybe five months
2. old. //A: Right// But, he never did anything. He never changed a
3. nappy. He wouldn't get up in the night to feed him and, it, it was just,
4. I may as well just of been on my own anyway.

Christine

1. When I was with him anyway I was on my own. D'you know, he
2. didn't help me anyway. So I done it all myself...I was worn out and,
3. he didn't help me and, just felt more on my own than I am now,
4. being on my own.

Two participants also observed that they felt less alone after giving birth. Rachel, who felt scared of being alone at night, commented of her baby, '*I feel more confident if I'm with her*'. Christine, who had felt very isolated and alone after leaving care, commented that, as a mother, she would never be alone again, and saw this as a major factor in her decision to leave the baby's father.

Loss

A sense of loss has been noted to be commonly associated with motherhood (Barclay et al. 1997; Woollett and Marshall 2000), and the association of motherhood with loss was strong for some. Many remarked that it was difficult to adjust to the restrictions placed on their lives by motherhood, particularly not being able to work or to socialise regularly. Although many viewed this as an acceptable 'downside' to a generally positive experience, a few initially associated motherhood strongly with loss. Linda presented a particularly resigned view. She described her life as boring and had difficulty adjusting to the losses.

Linda

1. It just felt like a complete change in my life. Something you've got
2. to get used to, in't it?...Can't go out. Can't do half the things you
3. used to. It's just like - everything just stops.

While some other participants had similar feelings to Linda, most had more mixed feelings, and there were also many young women who did not predominantly associate motherhood with loss. Instead, they described how they found that their own interests and lifestyle changed, and that they no longer wanted the kinds of things their contemporaries wanted.

Marie

1. I didn't see't point of, like, people going out and getting drunk and
2. that. Just, seemed boring to me. //A: Mm// And like, when people
3. were like, going on these dead expensive holidays. Weren't my
4. thing. I wanted to be with Hannah all't time.

Not surprisingly then, 'becoming a mother' tended to set the young women apart from many of their contemporaries. This, in itself, could lead to a sense of isolation, unless the young women knew other young mothers. However, as the above comments by Marie suggest, the changes in lifestyle, daily routine and priorities meant they were on a different route from that of many former friends.

Prepared for motherhood?

It might be expected that young women, most of whom have unplanned pregnancies, would feel unprepared for becoming mothers. Barclay et al. (1997) suggest that many women initially feel that they are not ready. In this study, nearly all participants 'wished they had waited' a few years before having children, as they felt that they would have missed out on less, and that they would have had an established career, more financial security, more settled housing and marriage (see pages 240-2). However, for a considerable proportion, there was little sign that they felt unprepared for motherhood by the time of childbirth.

Sam

1. A And how did you feel about the um, the change, you know,
2. becoming a mum?
- 3.
4. S I didn't really, d'you know what I mean? You have nine months just,
5. there. Just got on wi' it. //A: Yeah// There were nowt to really think
6. about, like, 'Oh God this is drastic'. 'Cos she was so good, I just
7. thought, 'What's all't bloody fuss about? This is great!'

Here, Sam describes feeling prepared, but this excerpt also provides an example of the normalisation of life events that are often construed as 'difficult'. As various points in the interviews, young women commented either that they 'just got on with it', or used phrases such as, 'it's just part of being a mum' to indicate that what they were describing was 'normal' and unremarkable. Sam's comments can, perhaps, be viewed in this light.

Sonia, like several others, described feeling prepared for motherhood, because she had been carrying out domestic duties and responsibilities from an early age. She stated that she had been happy about the pregnancy, and, whilst her mother had told her that the reality of mothering would come as a shock to her, she had not found this to be the case: *'I'm not shocked at all you know. I was prepared for it, I think. I was thinking. I'm happy to be, like, having a baby'*. She asserted that motherhood involved not a change in identity but in lifestyle. Moreover, she felt she was prepared through past experience of looking after her mother's home:

Sonia

- 1 It's just, like, my life has changed, really. //A: Yeah// Not myself.
- 2 //A: Yeah// It's the way my life is. I can't, I don't go to college no
- 3 more and that. //A: Yeah// And like, I do the shopping, and all this.
- 4 //A: Uh huh// with my flat, and living on my own now //A: Yeah//
- 5 and everything. But I'm happy. I like it. I've always wanted, like,
- 6 from the time I was 15, I goes, 'mum, I can't wait 'til I move
- 7 out', you know? //A: Mm// Couldn't wait. //A: Mm// I goes, 'I can't
- 8 wait to be on my own. //A: Mm// In my own flat, do what I want'.

9 She was like, 'Your time will come, Sonia'. [laughs] 'No, but I want
10 it now!' [laughter]. And she goes, 'It'll be hard', and I goes 'I'll be
11 able to cope' because, my mum's house is ma:ssive. //A Mm// It's a
12 four bedroom. //A: Mm// And she's got an upstairs and downstairs.
13 Three floors, right. We used to, me and my sister used to get
14 together and clean the house //A: Yeah// and everything. We used to
15 wash up. We used to cook. I knew how to cook from 9.
16 //A: Yeah// From when I was 9, so I knew I'd be able to cope on
17 my own. I goes, 'Mum, it's like I'm living on my own, but I'm
18 living with all you's lot, and you just make me angry'. She's like,
19 'Your time will come'.

This experience of feeling 'grown up' from an early age was fairly common amongst participants. Again, young women who become mothers may need to emphasise this in order to state their 'qualification' for motherhood. It also highlights how dominant discourses of young people and children as lacking in responsibility fail to take account of the experiences of some, including young mothers, young carers and the many children and young people who undertake paid work. Rachel described herself as more mature than her own mother, while Nicola described herself as having been '*15, going on 50*' when she gave birth. Previous experience of caring and domestic responsibilities led them to feel they had been quite prepared for motherhood and for the responsibility it entails.

Adjustment and learning

Although many young women already had experience of childcare, some felt that looking after their own child was significantly different because of the responsibility involved. As Louisa commented, though she had looked after cousins, '*it's not like your own, is it?*' The learning of new skills began in hospital. Several of those who felt that they needed to learn how to care for a baby found nursing staff helpful in this process. However, none of the young women

felt that being young made a difference to their ability to become 'good enough' mothers. Instead, they argued that all first-time mothers go through an experiential process of finding out what works in childcare. This, they felt, was inadequately recognised by others, and they found that other people, particularly those who were older, tended to interfere in childcare and be unnecessarily critical.

Group five

1. Monica You're a young mum, right, you've never done it before, so
2. you don't know what to do, but it does come naturally, but
3. when you get other people down your throat, 'Oh, don't do
4. that like that, it'll give him wind' or 'Oh, she's got wind',
5. 'Her, oh, oh, d'you think, oh, I think she needs her bum
6. changing'. 'Oh, do it like this'. 'Oh, don't do that, don't put
7. that on her'. You know, and she's your baby.
- 8.
9. Christine That's my mother that is! [laughs]
- 10.
11. Monica And you're like, 'Shut up. I'll do what I want with my baby'.
12. You know.
- 13.
14. Christine Yeah, it makes you (unclear).
- 15.
16. Monica It's nothing to do with anyone else. That really, that hurt me,
17. when I had Geraldine. Cos I felt like I couldn't do nothing
18. right. Everyone was telling me I was doing everything
19. wrong, but I wasn't. I was doing things my way.

As this segment suggests, many participants felt that, because of their relative youth, other mothers would feel free to criticise them. They also felt that they did not have any latitude to make mistakes and learn by experience, as their mothering would be closely scrutinised for errors.

Group Three

1. Jan At end o't day, right, I look at it like this. It don't matter how old
2. you are. If it's your first kid, no:body knows nothing. You learn
3. as you – you make your mistakes, and you learn as you go
4. ahead, whether you're 32 or 14, //A: Mm// it's summat you
5. learn. Nobody like, gives birth and knows exactly what to do. I

6. mean, I were only 16, I was stuck in the middle of an house in
7. Sunnington, with no:body and you just get on with it. (p) Uh?
8.
9. Jayshree That's what I mean. You need people.
10.
11. Jan Why? There's nowt wrong wi' my kids, and I did it on my own.
12.
13. Sam And I did it on my own.
14.
15. Alison D'you think it could have been made ea:sier for you?
16.
17. Jan No, because it goes over (the edge), because you go over, that
18. I'm sorry like, but they do. All - social services and all
19. that support, right – don't just stop there. They have to pass that
20. line. You end up with more crap than what you started with.

This discourse of it's being 'best to go it alone' needs to be placed in a wider context of fears of intervention, particularly for care leavers like Jan and Sam, who fear social services intervention will focus on child protection rather than on support for themselves. This is one of the likely reasons why some young women expressed the need to be highly independent⁵. Once on the margins, it might prove safer to stay there, though, as we saw from Jan's earlier comments, this can make mothering a very isolating experience.

DIVERSITY IN ACCOUNTS

Difficult transitions to motherhood

Although some young women took motherhood in their stride and others gradually adapted, a minority had particular difficulties during the first few months of motherhood, facing depression or coping difficulties. Three were diagnosed as suffering from post-natal depression following the birth of their first child and two after the birth of a second child. Two more suffered depression following the end of a violent relationship. Focussing on first-time motherhood,

⁵ These points are developed further in Chapter Eight.

there were a number of factors influencing whether the young women coped well or not. These included the degree of support received from informal networks and professional sources, the legacy of past traumatic experiences, the degree of material deprivation, and how settled their home life was.

Women who have been in care are sometimes expected to have particular difficulties with mothering due to expectations of a 'cycle of abuse' (see Chapter One). In this study, although there was no evidence of this, it appears that past trauma/abuse could lead young women to be particularly anxious about their own children's safety. In addition, the transition to motherhood could intensify unconscious anxieties about childhood being a time of danger and vulnerability. For example, Emma talked about having been sexually abused as a child. Whilst she described the abuse as having been 'dealt with' (in terms of prosecution), she described the legacy of the abuse during pregnancy:

Emma

1. E When me first child were born, um, I had to go and see a psychiatric
2. nurse. //A: Right// Cos, thought I was going mental. I was..
3. [
4. A You thought you were? Or they
5. thought you were?
6. []
7. E U:m... People that I'd spoke to thought I was going mad.
8. Not mad, but the fact was I was having really vicious nightmares. //A:
- 9 Right. Yeah// Um, to the extreme that people was kidnapping my little
- 10 boy? //A: Yeah// Um, people were killing him – u:m, numerous things.
- 11.
12. A Very scary then.
- 13.
14. E Very, very scary. //A: Yeah// Um, and when it come to, when I went
15. to see this shrink, if you want to call them that. //A: Uh huh// Um,
16. when I went to see her, she said it was due to the fact that I was
17. abused. //A: Right// Um, it's my way of protecting him.

Emma felt that the sexual abuse she had suffered as a child led her to be particularly anxious about the safety and health of her children at times. However, it is important to note that Emma had no care history. This emphasises the point that it cannot be assumed that care leavers have markedly different histories from those who have not. Such assumptions may, in fact, be based on a widespread ignorance of, or reluctance to accept the extent of child abuse.

Jan's description of her coping difficulties (and of their outcome) was quite different. In the previous excerpt from Jan's narrative (see page 167), she described being given a house in an unfamiliar area, as a 16-year old lone mother, with minimal support. She went on to explain the problems with this situation:

Jan

1. J So I had to get a private landlord, and that were cack⁶. You know,
2. have you ever had dealings with private landlords?
3. [
4. A Yeah. Yeah.
- 5.
6. J They wouldn't do repairs, Oh, like, it were horrible. //A: Yeah//
7. Then Daniel started with asthma, and he were really poorly. Oh I
8. just went from place to place to place. Then they, um - because I
9. went into social services and said I, like, 'I need help. I can't cope.
10. I can't get rid of his dad. He's coming round hassling me'. Like, he
11. were on drugs and everything else, and....
12. [
13. A So you weren't with his dad?
- 14.
15. J No. We split up when I were pregnant. //A: Yeah// Um, 'I can't –
16. like, he's hassling me. He's, like, slapping me when he feels like it.
17. //A: Mm// Um, he's bringing all his mates round. I'm having police
18. at door for him all 't time', Because I'd got, I'd got Andy
19. Cooper's baby, it were like, I knew where Andy Cooper were,
20. d'you know? [laughs] //A: Yeah// So like, first place they'd come
21. and raid were like, my house, with my babby there //A: Yeah//
22. So I were, like, going into social services, saying 'I - I need help.
23. I need, I need this', So they said because I went into social

⁶ 'Cack' is dialect for excrement.

24 services and I asked for help, I weren't high priority, because I
 25 said that I needed help, so, and then they ended up taking him off
 26 me, saying that I were failing to protect him, because I was still
 27 letting Andy near him. But, and that were - just after, just, No –
 28 October, it were just before Christmas. That's very tough. Because,
 29 or it might have been just after Christmas, I'm not really sure, but
 30 he was about six months old. He were six months old when they
 31 took him off me. And I got him back a couple of weeks before his
 32 sixteenth birthday. His sixteenth birthday! [laughs] His... no, I
 33 got him back a couple of month before his first birthday.

Jan attributes her difficulties to a combination of post-natal depression, a particularly strong sense of a loss of independence on becoming a mother, limited support from her birth family, social isolation, inadequate housing, a sick child, and being subject to harassment and violence by her baby's father. Jan's interpretation of the situation is that her requests for support for herself and for her child were not heard, and that, instead of support, intervention was decided upon, in order to protect her child. While we have only Jan's account here, and she does state at another point in the interview how her son has been adversely affected by witnessing domestic violence, the key point here is that Jan's *experience* was of being unsupported. This provides the backdrop to Jan's assertion that it is best to 'go it alone' without support (see page 173-4).

Ruth similarly had difficulties coping when she became a mother for the first time, and placed her child in foster care for several months:

Ruth

1. R Kelly went into foster care when she was about three, four
2. months. //A: Did she?// Yea:h. Cos I got burgled, and my boyfriend
3. had gone to prison, and I just didn't know how to cope with it. D'you
4. get me? //A: Yea:h// So, I put her in foster care for, d'you know what
5. I mean? For her really. Not for me. Cos I didn't have anything to
6. wash clothes with, or anything. //A: Yeah// So I thought to myself,
7. well, the best bet is just to put her in care, and I knew I was gonna
8. get her back at the end of it, when I'd got myself sorted ou:t.
9. //A: Yeah// So - that's what I did.

10.
11. A Yeah. How did that feel, to do that?
12.
13. R It felt ha:rd, because like, you don't, I don't think I realised how
14. much I loved her until I'd lost her. D'you get me? //A: Yeah// How
15. much, how much time I used to give her and everything.

Ruth, like Jan, was a care leaver. She was not in contact with her birth family and had no little informal support to draw upon. Thus, when she became a lone mother and her home was broken into, she had no further resources on which to draw. Whilst the circumstances of the two young women are different, they are linked by lack of material resources, of social support, and of support from the child's father. Both also described being 'kicked out of care' at 15 and 16.

Thus, the young women in this study, whilst all under 21 at the time of becoming mothers, were in a variety of circumstances. Becoming a mother for the first time is very often a difficult transition. If additional stressors are added to this, it can tip the balance in whether a young mother can cope in the first few months of her child's life. Emotional issues, brought to the surface through becoming a mother, are one such stressor (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983; R. Parker 1997; Maynes and Best 1997). However, it cannot be assumed that this is always the primary factor with young women who have been in care. Other factors that can lead to coping difficulties are poverty and lack of material resources. If combined with inadequate social support, these can, in some cases, lead young women to crisis point in their ability to cope as mothers.

Easier than expected transitions

Some participants found this time much less difficult either than they had expected or than others had led them to believe. There were a variety of reasons for this, including that motherhood was not as difficult as other challenges they had faced. For example, Ebele vividly described the lack of fit between her hypothetical narrative (Riessman 1991) of the transition to motherhood, constructed prior to childbirth, and the reality of her experience:

Ebele

1. A So, how are things, how are things in general, at the moment, for you?
- 2.
3. E Um, they're quite good actually. //A: Yeah// Er, but, I thought, when
4. I got pregnant, I thought it was gonna be difficult, so hard, um, you
5. know, in general. Um, yeah, it's okay. It's a lot, I wouldn't say it's a
6. lot easier, it's just not, as, difficult as what I thought it would be.
7. Um, mainly because of him, you know, but, it's not that hard. People
8. say, 'Oh, countless sleepless nights, but, not from what I know. You
9. know, it's been a month, and I have no excessive bags underneath
10. my eyes, so you know, I guess it's not that bad.
- 11..
12. A Yeah. So what sorts of things were you imagining?
- 13.
14. E Um, PND. Post Natal Depression. //A: Yeah?// Not to that extent,
15. you know, a couple of steps before it. I was expecting, I couldn't,
16. you know, hear him crying, 'cos I'd be to the point where 'Oh my
17. God. I can't take it any more', or I leave him here, and I go to the
18. living room, and I cry, cry, cry, cry, cry. But not, that's not what gets
19. to me. He doesn't actually get to me //A: Uh huh// He has his
20. moments, but he doesn't get to me. //A: Mm// I can deal with it.

Ebele implies that there are other aspects of her life that are *more* difficult to cope with than motherhood, in the phrase, 'that's not what gets to me'. She then contrasts this anticipated reaction to becoming a mother with the devastating experience of being shunned by her family during pregnancy. My question to her (line 21) is an attempt to clarify her previous remarks:

21. A So are you generally feeling you're coping better than you imagined
 22. //E: Yes// you would?
 23.
 24. E And it's also because of family. Um, they were the ones, when I told
 25. them I was pregnant, they didn't want to know. They shunned me.
 26. They said 'Okay, fine. We don't want to know you. Go away'. Um,
 27. I moved in here by myself, I painted everything by myself. Um, and
 28. then, I had, when I had Jerome, I called my cousin, who, then, no, I
 29. called her, I left a message on her voice-mail, and her mum picked
 30. up, and listened to her voice-mail, and then, (my family have come
 31. back, and I'm) thinking 'Are they coming back because they want
 32. to, or because I have a boy?' Because from my background,
 33. Nigerian, it's, it's better to have a boy, just like the Asians, it's very
 34. good to have boys. I don't know why. It's not gonna carry on the
 35. family name. //A:Uh huh// But they just, were calling, [unclear] but,
 36. to me, it's like, when, you, when someone shuns you, and you cry
 37. and cry and cry, you get over it, and you decide to move on.

Ebele's sense of isolation and rejection at the response of her family is clearly portrayed in this passage. Compared with her distress at the lack of support from her family, the difficulties of caring for a new-born child appear minor to her. Furthermore, this passage emphasises the moral sanctions imposed upon some 'teenage mothers', such that family members would shun them. For Ebele, then, motherhood and mothering were relatively easy, compared to other difficulties.

Ebele's account also provides evidence against the assumption in popular discourse that it is more culturally acceptable for black young women to become pregnant as teenagers or outside marriage. On the contrary, for Ebele, moral sanctions were imposed by her family during her pregnancy, due to their disapproval. Whilst these sanctions may have had little or nothing to do with her ethnic background, such accounts may lead to a questioning of the assumption that teenage pregnancy is viewed as a 'cultural norm' within black communities. They should also lead to a questioning of an analysis of teenage motherhood that treats black young women as a homogeneous group.

Other young women simply found that they took to motherhood easily. Having anticipated difficulties, they were surprised at how smooth they found the transition to motherhood. For example, Moira described how, when she was first a mother, she found it *'easy really. People said it would be dead difficult, but it wasn't'*. Perhaps it is significant that Moira was in a settled cohabiting relationship with a partner, who took a share of the childcare. Trish also had a smooth transition. Having been initially frightened when she found that she was pregnant, she felt quite prepared by late pregnancy:

Trish

1. A And how did feel about having, um, a new baby? Were you still
2. frightened at that point?
- 3.
4. T No:, just - there and I loved him, so. [laughs].
- 5.
6. A And did you feel that you - had an idea of what to do, with a new baby?
7. [
8. T Yeah, because I'd
9. baby-sat for babies and everything before. I'd a load of experience
10. there.

Thus, some young women found the adjustment to motherhood unproblematic, and considerably easier than they had previously anticipated or been told to expect by others. Therefore, this research supports the view of Phoenix (1991a) that some young women find motherhood relatively unproblematic and seem to cope well.

CONCLUSION

The transition to motherhood is frequently a difficult time of change in identity and loss. In many ways, these accounts are strikingly similar to those that might be expected from older mothers. However, there are some important differences. For many participants, 'becoming a mother' was associated with other transitions,

including moving to independence for the first time. This is often seen as a sign of instability in the life of a young woman, and may be seen as impacting negatively upon her mothering abilities, yet such moves were seen by young women as a means of achieving stability after, in some cases, many years of instability while in care. Motherhood was often associated with 'settling down'.

Furthermore, discourses of 'normal motherhood' exclude 'teenage mothers' so that the young women had to stake their claim to motherhood and earn the right to be viewed as mothers by others. It is argued here that this leads some participants to describe a transformation in their identity on becoming mothers. This is in contrast with previous research that describes women as gradually taking on the identity of 'mother'. Perhaps it is only possible to resist the identity of mother if it has already been conferred by others. The young women had to take up this identity for themselves.

The young women's stories contain a range of experiences of coping with adjustment to motherhood. Whilst it is difficult to provide a set of determining 'risk factors', coping ability is mediated by the level of social support (Barclay et al. 1997; Woollett and Marshall 2000), by the behaviour of the baby and the mother's response to this, and by the extent of previous childcare experience (Barclay et al. 1997). The young women's ability to cope was also mediated by the resources upon which they were able to draw. These resources included professional support, material resources (such as money, housing), emotional resources and resilience. Their ability to cope could also be compromised by the necessity of moving suddenly to independence with inadequate support.

Overall, it is argued that material resources, degree of social support and issues of identity, emotional resources and resilience are as important in the transition to motherhood as the age of the mother. Even those who became mothers at 16 or under were able to cope given adequate support from family, foster carers and professionals. The young women did not see their youth as making it substantially more difficult for them to take on the identity of a mother. However, they had often had to earn the right to be considered mothers by others.

Chapter Six

The Meanings of Motherhood and Fatherhood

Being there for someone else, no matter what. You've got to be there.
(Monica)

This chapter explores the subjective meanings of motherhood for the young women, along with their perspectives on the role of fathers. The first section directly considers the meanings of motherhood and mothering. As in the previous chapter, the young women make a claim to be 'good enough mothers' through their emphasis on responsibility and on 'being there, no matter what'. Their accounts reveal the ways in which they mother in the context of poverty and how they juggle their children's development with their own.

The second section considers the ways in which the identity of 'mother' combines with other aspects of identity, with biography and social practices. In particular, it explores how the meanings of motherhood relate to youth and class, including material circumstances, labour market position, educational experience and working-class identity. The young women are often tentative in describing their own identities and some think of themselves exclusively as mothers. In the absence of readily available work-based identities, which many of them wish for, their sense of self is derived primarily through intimate relationships with others, including children, partners and family of origin.

The third section explores the articulation of conceptions of motherhood with heterosexual femininity, and particularly with notions of girls and women as carers. It examines how the meanings of motherhood relate to feminine identity

and also to young women's own experiences of being mothered / parented. It is argued that notions of young women as carers are shaped by the socialisation of girls, and also by the experience of many participants of receiving less than adequate care themselves, often in institutional settings.

The chapter also explores the meanings of the phrase, 'being a father' from the young women's perspectives. The young women's accounts of the fathers of their children are extremely diverse: from those who have shared parenting, to those who never see the father of their child. In the latter category were fathers who had been violent and those who were viewed as a child protection risk by young women or professionals. Whilst men's role in teenage pregnancy cannot be ignored, the term 'teenage parenthood' is sometimes conflated with that of 'teenage motherhood'. This can mask the ways in which parenting is constructed as a gendered activity, and equally masks the ways in which women frequently take both responsibility and blame for childcare.

In many ways, the meanings of motherhood for the young women are very similar to those for other women. However, they differ in the specific ways in which motherhood intersects with youth, class and biography. Nevertheless, it is shown that, whilst teenage mothers are frequently associated with an 'underclass' (Murray 1990; 1996) which rejects mainstream norms and values, the young women actually subscribe to mainstream values of femininity, including marriage, work and the traditional family. The key argument here is that the experience and meanings of motherhood need to be socially located, and early motherhood understood as a means of negotiating personal and social worlds.

THE MEANINGS OF MOTHERHOOD

The young women's accounts of mothering are characterised by pride, love and satisfaction but also by loss, frustration, and, above all, by the day-to-day experience of hard physical and emotional work, sustained over months and years. It is important to present all these aspects, since to deny difficulties is unrealistic, negates young women's achievements, and can serve to compound the difficulties and guilt that ensue from maternal frustration or perceived failure (Maynes and Best 1997; R. Parker 1997).

In group interviews, the young women were asked what the phrase 'being a mother' meant to them. Many of the features of their replies are evident in the following excerpt from a group interview:

Group Five

1. Alison When people talk about 'being a mother', what does that
2. phrase mean to you?
- 3.
4. Christine Being shattered all the time! [laughs]
- 5.
6. Monica Being grown up.
- 7.
8. Alison Being grown up.
- 9.
10. Monica Yeah. Being there for someone else, no matter what, you've
11. got to be there.
- 12.
13. Christine? (You've gotta grow up then)
- 14.
15. Monica You can't, you've got no freedom, when you're on your
16. own, you can't go anywhere. Starting to feel like that, (me).
17. That's it.
- 18.
19. Alison Do the rest of you feel the same?
- 20.
21. Naseem Yeah.

22. Monica = Like when all your mates are going out and you can't get a
 23. baby-sitter, you've got no baby-sitter and that. You're just
 24. sat in, gutted all night. [unclear].
 25.
 26. Nazia You have to plan everything as well, you can't suddenly
 27. decide you want to go out.
 28.
 29. Alison Mmm. Yeah. So do you think, er....
 30. [Brief interruption]
 31. Kirsty Being a mother, being filthy all the time!
 32.
 33. Monica Oh yeah! [laughing] Never having no money, that's worst.
 34. Never. Can't just go out and treat yourself. You've got to
 35. think about what you've got to spend on these first.
 36.
 37. Christine It's alright though, really. [unclear] about it, just,=
 38.
 39. Monica =Oh yeah=
 40.
 41. Christine =at first it's tiring.
 42.
 43. Monica (That's definite), there's more good than bad - really.
 44. []
 45. Christine Well, I feel that,
 46. anyway.
 47.
 48. Alison Mm, so say something about the good. (p). What's the
 49. good?
 50.
 51. Monica Like when they first say the first word or they first walk, and
 52. like, it was Geraldine's birthday the other week, and (you're
 53. just dead pleased) on her birthday, you know. And she's just
 54. started talking as well, so, you know like, when you hear
 55. that, and like, when the first tooth comes, and daft things
 56. like that - you just get all giddy.

Here, the young women's associations of motherhood are with tiredness; being 'grown up' and thus responsible; loss of freedom, social life and spontaneity; dirt and mess; lack of money; and personal sacrifice. The emphasis on motherhood as 'being grown up' conveys a sense of being propelled into adulthood. Here, and in other interviews, the contradictory nature of their feelings is evident. They initially point out the difficulties in mothering, which

seem to predominate. Having listed these, Christine interrupts with, 'it's alright though, really', prompting agreement from Monica, who talks of the satisfactions of childcare and of seeing children grow up. Monica's statement 'there's more good than bad' (line 43) and Christine's agreement seem almost surprising following a long discussion of the negative aspects. Perhaps also, this stress on negative aspects needs to be set in the context of the group interview, at the end of which, the participants laughed about how they enjoyed the chance to get together and 'have a good moan'.

Women may find motherhood worthwhile overall if they gain either satisfaction from the day-to-day tasks of looking after children or a sense of meaning and purpose from mothering (Boulton 1983). However, the need to present a balance of negative and positive aspects of motherhood in the research interview may be heightened for younger mothers. Emphasising responsibility, being 'grown up', hard work and sacrifice is both a reflection of their (frequently unacknowledged) experience as mothers and a means of demonstrating that they are 'good-enough' mothers. Such features could be a product of reactivity in the interview process. However, even if this were the case, it may tell us something about how young mothers feel the need to present themselves to 'outsiders', including researchers, health and welfare professionals, and members of the public.

The participants had many different associations with the concept of 'being a mother', which can be categorised as follows:

- (i) Money, budgeting and / or poverty
- (ii) Hard work / challenges

- (iii) Chronic tiredness
- (iv) Responsibility
- (v) Sacrifice, loss (of freedom, of self)
- (vi) Pleasure in meaning and purpose (satisfaction of watching a child grow up)
- (vii) Enjoyment of looking after children

While some of these features are likely to be remarked upon by any group of mothers, some may have specific connotations for young mothers. For example, it is likely that many parents would equate having a baby with 'hard work', and motherhood is likely to restrict both a woman's freedom to go out, and impact negatively on her financial status. A few young women reported feeling frequently bored and generally unsatisfied. For example, when asked what she did during the day, Linda replied, '*Nothing. Just clean and wash*'. She stated that she was often bored. When asked what she did to relieve boredom, she replied, '*just watch telly. There's nowt to do*'. However, the participants were particularly severely affected by poverty, lone parenthood and unemployment, so that the need to provide for their children often meant they had very little to spend on themselves. Restrictions were particularly marked amongst the participants because of a high rate of lone motherhood and lack of familial support. Being unable to afford childcare led them to equate motherhood with particularly severe restrictions on mobility and material resources. None was in paid employment at the time of interview; and all but two were dependent on state benefits. The exceptions were one who was economically dependent on her partner, and one on her parents. Some of their accounts of their daily lives were therefore characterised by isolation and weak support networks.

Having said this, some were highly resourceful in drawing upon both community resources and educational facilities. While the popular stereotype of young mothers portrays them as actively seeking a 'life on the dole' this was generally contradicted by the findings. Many young women had not done as well at school as they had hoped. In some cases this was due to pregnancy and childbirth coinciding with revision and exams. In other cases, attendance had been irregular. In the most extreme example, Louisa had not been to school between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. Naseem had been excluded from school for glue sniffing, and Yvonne had not attended school regularly because of a drug habit. Both Naseem and Yvonne were care leavers, and some care leavers felt there was considerable peer pressure not to go to school, and also that when they did attend, they were treated differently or stigmatised by school staff and students because of being in care. As Jan commented, *'if I was going to be different, I'd be different out on the streets'*.

Having the responsibility of a child, however, appears to have made a marked difference in attitudes towards education, making them want to achieve more, both for themselves and their children. Only one young woman was still in compulsory education, but since leaving school and becoming mothers, several young women had been in further education. One had 'A' levels and was at university. Three others had NVQ or BTEC qualifications, and two more were working towards 'A' levels. Several had recently enrolled for GCSE and nursing courses in further education, including two who had missed substantial time from school. Many who had previously not been particularly interested or

motivated in their education described themselves as developing a new determination to gain qualifications and a 'decent job' once they had their child.

Yvonne

1. I never used to go to school. So, I think that it's about time that I
2. started doing something with my life, because now I've got a baby,
3. and I can't be on Income Support for the rest of my life, so I need to
4. better myself, so that he can live a better life

Yvonne makes a direct connection here between having her child and deciding to go back into education - one that was made by many participants. It could be argued that such comments were generated by the young women's expectations of what the interviewer would want to hear. Interestingly, Yvonne stated that she wanted to do something vocational like hairdressing, not something boring *'where you have to just write, and you have to go and do researches and everything'*. However, the fact that they had enrolled on college courses would contradict the view that such accounts were entirely a result of reactivity.

Overall, these accounts suggest that the young women's experiences of mothering do not differ significantly from other groups of working-class mothers, except that mothering may run concurrent with other transitions, including education, housing and relationship transitions. Like older mothers, many participants characterise motherhood as tiring, routine, repetitive and isolating, as well as rewarding. Nevertheless, it is also apparent that some of the young women were engaged in varied activities in their everyday lives. The purpose of some of these was to improve the quality of life of their children, such as nursery or social activities. Others were for themselves, including young mothers' support groups, community groups and college courses. It is interesting and sad to note that they

can improve their lives for someone else (their child) but that it seems more difficult for young women to do something for themselves.

Motherhood, youth and class

In group interviews, the young women were asked how they would describe themselves. This elicited a range of responses, including some answers in terms of personality traits, and others in terms of social identities and relationships, such as, *'I'd say I'm a young mother, and I've got a house, and I'm with the baby's dad'*. In some cases (two groups particularly), responses were characterised by apparent difficulties over verbal self-definition¹. The group members either defined themselves exclusively in terms of motherhood or else had difficulty, or perhaps reluctance, in answering at all. For example, Ruth initially stated, *'I wouldn't know what to say'*. After giving it some thought, she eventually responded with, *'My name's Ruth and I'm a full-time mum'*. There may be a number of reasons for these apparent difficulties over self-definition. It could simply be because this was an early question in the group interviews and therefore felt exposing. It could be that such questions are culturally or class specific. It could also be that the young women found it difficult to define themselves, thus indicating ambiguities and uncertainties over identity. It is also possible that nobody had ever asked them before.

The following extract suggests that some participants identified themselves solely through their mothering.

¹ This was not the case with all the young women, and some told extremely clearly articulated narratives of their lives and of their position within the life events they narrated.

Group Five

1. Monica A mother [P], a mother and a mother. That's it. That's all I
2. am. A mother. I'm not anything else. I'm....
- 3.
4. Christine A mother to my baby, a mother to my boyfriend.
- 5.
6. Kirsty Yeah.
- 7.
8. Monica Actually, that is right. That's all I am. I'm a mum.
 .
 .
9. That's the only thing I am: a mother. I'm not working at the
10. moment, or owt, so that's it. I'm (...) well no, I'm a friend,
11. (so) my friends, and I'm...
- 12.
13. Christine It's (just about) the family, really, innit really, your (...)
14. family, like a daughter and a mother and (...).

This segment is marked by Monica's repetition that she is defined solely through her status as a mother. It is her immediate response and yet she returns to it three times over the course of the next few minutes, as if gradually realising that this is her only source of identity.

The above excerpt suggests that, for these group members, identity is bound up with the private sphere of the family and with informal networks. Having stated that she is 'only' a mother, Monica then realises that she also has an identity through her friendships. This is confirmed by Christine, who stresses the importance of familial relationships in her self-definition. For young women, the private sphere has traditionally been a key source of identity, as femininity requires girls and women to be connected to, and meet the needs of others (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983). Moreover, the identity of 'a mother, a mother and a mother' reflects the reality of parenting for these and other women - that it takes all of their time and energy, leaving little physical or emotional energy for themselves. It also reflects the ways in which, selflessness and natural self-

abnegation are key aspects to the dominant discourse of the idealised 'mother' (Maynes and Best 1997). Once they become mothers, women may lose the right to subjectivity.

These issues also require placing in a socio-economic context. Opportunities for young women have apparently expanded in unprecedented ways during the last few years, with young women overtaking young men in 'A' level results in 1988/89 (Matheson and Summerfield 2000), and the 'feminisation of labour' enabling women to take more of a role in the workplace. However, such shifts are extremely patchy and have been accompanied by a contraction of opportunities for working-class young people and the 'feminisation of poverty'. Official statistics for 1999 show that, amongst those not in full-time education, young men were more likely to be in full-time employment than young women and more than three times as likely to be 'economically active' (Matheson and Summerfield 2000). Thus, the young women's identification with the private sphere may be further accentuated by the lack of alternative sources of identity, particularly as many have been denied access to adequate education and work through being in care and/or living in areas of social deprivation. This is exemplified by the following group exchange. It was prompted by one group member, Carol, drawing a contrast between the present time when she has to constantly think of her son, and 'when you're on your own' when you can do 'anything you want'. Trish's response, then, is in contrast with this.

Group Two

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 1. Trish | I find, like, because, if you didn't, like, get, if you didn't |
| 2. | have any work - and like, you didn't have no money, I just, |
| 3. | the time. |
| 4. | [|

5. Julie You'd be stuck in.
- 6.
7. Trish The time went so slow, and they take up, they take up time,
8. so.
9. [
10. Julie Yeah
- 11.
12. Trish Your day seems to go faster, don't it.

It is interesting that both Trish and Julie make a clear link between not being mothers, boredom and unemployment. Given that this has been not only their own experience but also that of many of their contemporaries (as they live on a housing estate with a rate of unemployment well above the national average), it may be less surprising. Where young women have to negotiate their own routes into adulthood, motherhood can provide a rare source of achievement.

Nevertheless, paid work is something to which most aspire. Only Julie said that she did not really want to work, that she found it boring and much preferred motherhood. Monica's definition of herself as 'a mother, a mother, and a mother' involved the observation that she is 'not working at the moment or owt, so that's it'. It is sometimes argued that paid work is central to masculine identities, so that rising rates of male unemployment impact heavily upon men's identities. However, the young women also saw paid work as an aspect of identity, and economic dependency as neither permanent nor desirable. As we have seen in the first section, some were taking active steps to gain qualifications, and others wanted to do so once their children were older.

Christine

1. C I want a job, and I want to be able to bring him up properly, and get
2. him what he wants, and all that.
- 3.
4. A Yea:h.(p) When you say bringing up properly - what sort of things are

5. (you thinking of?)
6. [
7. C I don't, I know, my mum's never been on the dole, and she's never
8. raised me on the dole, so I don't want him to be raised on the dole.
9. //A: Right// I know it's a – it's not a bad thing to say. It's a good thing
10. in a way, cos I don't want to be stuck in a rut, being on the social all
11. my life. //A: Yeah// I don't want him to grow up and think that's what
12. he's got to do. //A: Yeah// At the end of the day he's going to learn off
13. me, isn't he? //A: Yeah. Yeah// So if I stay on the social all my life,
14. that's what he's gonna do. I don't know how I ended up going on it,
15. [laughs] cos I've no family on the social. //A: Mm// They all work. (p)
16. It's just I think, with leaving care. If I'd have stayed at home I think
17. I'd have – gone and got a job straight away or summat, but with
18. leaving care, I just couldn't be arsed.

Christine makes a clear association between bringing her son up 'properly' and not being 'raised on the dole'. Here, she seems to be addressing notions of state dependency and of a supposed 'scrounger mentality' amongst young mothers (see pages 224-7). As with the comments of Yvonne (page 191), it could be argued that Christine's comments here are the outcome of reactivity – that is, that she felt the need to convince the interviewer that she had not chosen a 'life on the dole'. However, I would argue that there is evidence to the contrary. In fact, her comment that she 'just couldn't be arsed' to get a job seems slightly contradictory, given that she had earlier described having a place on a training scheme for a while when she left care and had later had a number of jobs.

The paid work available to working-class young women is likely to be routine and repetitive. Indeed, the focus on getting young people into work, as the key transition to adulthood, is problematic, given the high rates of unemployment experienced by young people in general, and by those in areas of social deprivation in particular. Furthermore, motherhood is not only an alternative route to adulthood; 'it provides a route that is far safer than the roads to

adulthood that many young men and other young women in the same communities are taking, that is, routes of crime, incarceration, and violent interpersonal confrontations' (Flanagan 1998: 251).

Finally, questions of self-definition need to be considered in the context of leaving care. Previous research suggests that those who have been in care are likely to face particular difficulties in personal and social identity (Biehal et al. 1995; Stein and Carey 1986). This may stem from trauma before going into care, and from instability of placements and attachments, institutionalisation (Stein and Carey 1986) and even abuse (DOH 1997, 2000) whilst in care. In addition, the stigma of being 'in care' can lead some children and young people to feel profoundly alienated (CLA 2001). Such factors can make it difficult for young people to maintain a sense of where they have come from and where they are going.

On leaving care, a lack of support and stability can further compound a sense of not belonging, at least temporarily (Biehal et al. 1995), leading care leavers to have a particular need for a sense of connection, belonging and stability. There are a number of ways of achieving this, including improving family relationships and career-based identities. However, such unstable circumstances can also provide powerful incentives to 'settle down' and have a family of one's own. As Linda (a care leaver) stated, *'some people want to have their babies when they're young, because they want to grow up and settle down'*. Being a mother can provide a clear identity and a sense of self-efficacy. Biehal et al. found that, 'a number of the young mothers felt that parenthood gave them growing confidence through giving them a clear role and status as mothers' (1995: 86) and there is some

evidence to support this from the current study. For example, Nazia described motherhood as follows, *'I liked it, and I still do. And it's helped me as well. Like, I wouldn't change it for anything'*.

Motherhood and being mothered

The meanings of motherhood for women are indelibly marked by their own experiences of being mothered (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983), and some young women discussed 'being a mother' in relation to their own experience of 'being mothered'. Three aspects of this will be explored here. First, some young women positioned themselves as both mothers and, at the same time, as *being* mothered. Secondly, some talked about mothering in ways that suggest that it may involve 're-mothering the self'. Thirdly, many strongly identified with a 'caring' role.

It is notable that some of the women positioned themselves simultaneously as a mother to their child, and as a child to their mother. They experienced themselves as inhabiting an ambiguous position between childhood and adulthood, and as not only needing their parents but also their independence. This is a common experience of adolescence in contemporary western societies, due to the way it is structured as a prolonged period of 'training' for work and adulthood (Coleman 1999). Nevertheless, it is further accentuated by motherhood. This experience was more common for the younger mothers (under 18), and particularly for those who had not been in care, or had been on a short-term basis only. For example, Carol, who was 17 and living with her mother, commented, *'It's like, I can cope, and I can't cope, in a way. It's like, sometimes I need my mum. Sometimes I don't... Mum don't treat me like an adult. I'm still her kid'*. This was a relatively unusual

experience amongst the young women interviewed, who more frequently felt unmothered. Nevertheless, it is interesting to analyse here why it is considered a problem for a young woman to be reliant on her mother, whilst also being a mother herself. In some cases, mothering was often shared across the two generations. For example, Louisa remarked that, *'when he starts playing up, and I don't know what to do, my mum always takes him off me, cos my mum knows what's up wi' him'*.

Whilst such shared parenting could be seen as evidence of deficiency in the ability of young women to mother, this is based on a specific view of parenting within western industrialised societies as an exclusive mother-child dyad (Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Garcia Coll et al. 1998). As we saw in Chapter Two, it is also based on a white middle-class ideal. In many societies, parenting is shared across generations. Having said this, there appeared to be no significant differences in this between British participants (black or white) and those born in Pakistan, Nigeria and the Caribbean, and both Carol and Louisa (quoted above) are white working-class young women.

The needs of some young mothers to be parented themselves should not necessarily be seen as a deficit, but should be recognised as 'a need to continue their travels through adolescence while they parent' (Flanagan 1998: 253). Although it may cause problems for young mothers who lack support in their own right, such shared parenting, at any age, can make childcare considerably more manageable. Indeed, research suggests that reciprocal exchange of support

between parents and young mothers is 'correlated with increased mastery and life satisfaction and decreased depression and anxiety' (Stevenson et al. 1999).

For other young women, the experience of mothering was set against a back-drop of having lost their own mothers, through death or separation. It can be argued that, in such circumstances (regardless of age), mothering can be a way of regaining the lost mother. For example, Nicola commented, *'I'd just lost my mum like, three years earlier, and, in and out of care, and at the time, I just thought... "I've got somebody to look after, and I can be like how my mum was with me"'*.² This concept of regaining the 'lost mother' may also be applied to women who have experienced emotional deprivation, abuse or neglect. Where they do not feel 'mothered' – that is, nurtured – women may have the opportunity to heal this loss through caring for their child in ways in which they would wish to have been mothered themselves. For example, Nazia's mother had died when she was a small child and her father had brought her up, before entering care at the age of 13. In the following interview segment, she describes how this acts as a negative template against which to judge her own parenting.

Nazia

1. A So when you're bringing up your son, do you er, are their things from
2. your family that you use, because they're good ways of bringing up
3. a child?
4. []
5. N No. (p) Like er, I make sure the upbringing I had, that he doesn't have
6. that. //A: Right// 'Cos it was like - I don't know like, there's a lot of
7. things that happened in my family that, you know, how can I say, d'you
8. know, it wasn't the right way of bringing us up and that. //A: Yeah// And
9. I, for me like, I went to a family centre to learn things, and it was good,
10. because er, I wanted to do things the right way. //A: Yeah// I know some
11. things that I had been brought up with were wrong. //A: Yeah// And I
12. don't want to use the wrong things with my son.

² See page 162 for full excerpt.

Nazia provides a clear account of how she consciously parents her child in ways antithetical to her own upbringing, and her comments here seem to counter the 'cycle of abuse' hypothesis (see Chapter One). In another interview, Yvonne described how she felt considerable anger towards her mother for neglecting her and for placing her in care. Yvonne describes how this made her even more determined to look after her son well.

Yvonne

1. Being pregnant - changed - really, really, really changed my life.
2. //A: Mm// It turned my life upside down. //A: Yeah// But in a good way,
3. upside down, right. //A: Yeah// Cos I said to myself, 'Okay. This is one
4. thing I'm gonna make sure that I don't do. I'm not gonna make the same
5. mistake that my mum made'. //A: Uh huh// That's one thing I said, 'I'm
6. not gonna make the same mistake'. //A: Uh huh// 'I'm not gonna
7. abandon my child. I'm not even gonna let social services [bang] take my
8. child away from me. //A: Uh huh// (No, I thought) I'm gonna show to
9. them, I've been in care, I've got problems, but I can always switch off
10. my problems, and look after my child' //A: Uh huh// Right? 'Cos, right,
11. when, when my mum did what she did to us, that's one thing I always
12. said to, said to myself, if ever I had a child, I'm not gonna make them
13. suffer the way I've suffered. //A: Mm// I don't even want them to see that
14. side of life. //A: Mm// I want them to see the good part of life. I don't
15. want them to see the terrible sides that I've been through. //A: Mm//
16. Right? //A: Yeah// It's like, my son, that's why I'm saying, I'm gonna go
17. to college, make myself better, just because of my son.

This echoes previous research with young people in care, in which the majority of participants (and particularly young women) said that they would not bring up their children in the same ways as they have been (Corlyon and McGuire 1999). Some participants stated that they were consciously trying to make sure that their child did not have to face the trauma and difficulties that they had had to overcome, and to give their child a better start in life. This conscious aim may not be achievable for all young mothers (or other mothers) – a fact that was recognised by the participants (see page 263). Nevertheless, many expressed a

conscious determination to bring up their children in a stable and loving environment.

Heterosexual femininity and caring

A 'caring' identity forms a key aspect of hegemonic femininity (Skeggs 1997). Although they had not expected to be mothers so soon, many young women felt prepared by previous experience of 'caring' and domesticity as girls. A significant proportion strongly identified with the role of 'carer' and some had been invested in a 'caring' identity long before they became mothers. In the preceding chapter, it was argued that this meant that some felt prepared for motherhood. For others, there was much more of a contrast between their youthful identities before pregnancy and their identities as mothers. In either case, becoming a mother denotes entry into adult femininity. For example, Rachel lived next door to her parents who both have disabilities. She described herself as feeling older than her own mother: *'I'm 20 now but I feel - I mean, my Mum's 40 and I feel older than her'*. Rachel looked after her parents and often took care of her two younger siblings, in addition to looking after her baby:

Rachel

1. My mum and dad, like, can be nasty and stuff to me but, I've - from
2. day one probably, being born I were probably - I were probably
3. bred to like, care, d'you know what I mean? It's like, I used to work
4. in a nursing home, but that were getting too much for me, looking
5. after them and my mum again.

Other young women also cared for siblings, having a major role in bringing up younger brothers and sisters. Yvonne stated, *'I swear I was more like a mother to them than my mum'*. Carol similarly identified with a 'caring' role and explained her ambition to work in childcare in the following terms:

Carol

1. I've always thought about it, since I was like, little, from when my
2. cousin come and live with us because her dad and mum was
3. abusing her and everything //A: Yeah// and like, I thought, well, my
4. mum do it, so I'm gonna do it, you know, all the help my cousin's
5. getting out my mum and all this lot. //A: Yeah// And ever since then,
6. I just thought about, you know, help other children, that's what I
7. nee:d. //A: Mm// Because if I help other children - two hands is
8. better than that one. //A: Yeah// And, like, if somebody needs help, then
9. I'm always there.

Thus, Carol linked her interest in childcare and nursery nursing with her childhood experience of watching her own mother caring for other children. Almost all of those young women who had clear ideas about career choice wanted to join 'caring' professions, mainly care work, nursery nursing, general nursing, midwifery, and residential social work³. Many had work experience, much of it in care work in residential care for older people.

The wish to work in residential social work can be explained by a desire, amongst care leavers, to use their own experience to make things better for other children and young people in care. Some felt strongly that residential social workers did not necessarily have the personal experience necessary to empathise with children and young people in care. This sometimes had a class aspect to it:

Jan

1. I've always wanted to do it, always, because like, the thing that used
2. to piss me off when I was in't Kids Homes is like, I used to sit there
3. and there were staff that'd say, 'We know what you're going through',
4. **AND THEY HADN'T GOT A CLUE.** Like, they'd been brought up
5. with a silver spoon in their mouth, and they haven't got a clue.

³ Other desired careers mentioned by individual young women were hairdressing and fashion, catering, law, and work as a mortician.

However, the popularity of 'caring' work amongst young women also has other roots, based in the socialisation of girls:

[a woman] is well suited for her social role of handmaiden to others' activities. Her inner sense of unworthiness and unentitledness have been reinforced over and over again in the social constraints of her childhood and in the learning of her adult role. She has buried part of herself. (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983: 66)

An example of this learning to deny individual needs is provided by Carol (see above): who thought, '*help other children, that's what I need*'. Skeggs (1997) argues that, for young women who have poor employment prospects and limited cultural capital, 'caring (whether paid or unpaid) offers the means to value, trade and invest in themselves, an opportunity to "make something of themselves" ' (Skeggs 1997: 56). Similarly, McMahon comments that,

The desire and capacity to care, presents both a resource and a source of oppression in young women's lives. Young girls not only learnt to value caring for others but are *policed* to care and bear the costs of caring, especially for boyfriends. (McMahon 1995: 111, italics in original)

Skeggs further argues that such 'caring performances' are strongly linked to investments in hegemonic femininity and heterosexuality. Some of the young women had very clear identifications with a traditional form of femininity, which can be seen as both an investment in respectability and a desire for stability, love, belonging and a sense of place. For example, some described their hopes and dreams for an idealised future of a career, marriage, house and children, a wish that Emma described as '*the perfect fairy tale*'. The wish for a 'typical' family life was also remarked upon in a group interview with care leavers:

Group Three

1. Jan I've always lived wi't ideal, like, have a little family, I've
2. always wanted my husband, and then, me kids, and my own
3. home.
4. [
5. Sam Yeah, but
6. I just couldn't think of anybody that I would, like, d'you know
7. what I mean?
8.
9. Alison What's that, Jayshree?
10.
11. Jayshree That's my idea.
12.
13. Alison Right. Do you all have this picture of, of, that you could
14. have...
15. [
16. Jan Yeah. Typical
17. family. Man, woman, two kids. [unclear] Going to't seaside
18. for weekends, and going on holiday. That is, that is right!
19. [P]
20. ? Mm. Mm.
21.
22. Jan By the time I (get there), I tried marriage bit once. Didn't
23. work! [laughs] I'm a sucker though, I'm going back for it
24. again.
25.
26. Alison So if someone – it's worth trying again then?
27.
28. Jayshree But with someone=
29. =Somebody different.
30. Jan
31.
32. Alison Mm.
33.
34. Jayshree Got guts.
35.
36. Jan Who?
37.
38. Jayshree Got the guts to do it.

Thus, whilst young working-class women such as those in this study are often treated as living outside of mainstream values and norms – that is, as members of an 'underclass' - they do, in fact, have conventional hopes and ambitions for

themselves. They ascribe to mainstream values of achieving satisfaction in paid work and of living within a traditional nuclear family.

THE MEANINGS OF FATHERHOOD: 'INVISIBLE MAN'?

It is young women as mothers who are the primary focus of media discourses of 'teenage parents', and lone mothers who are the key cause for alarm amongst many commentators. It is also young women as mothers who are responsible for day-to-day parenting in an overwhelming majority of cases. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the role of fathers as constructed within hegemonic discourses of teenage parenthood, within which they are positioned in a number of ways. Firstly, they may be represented as delinquent young men who are incorrigible members of the 'underclass' (see pages 56-7). Secondly, it is often argued that men are excluded from parenting, both by women and by state agencies, particularly when they do not live with the mother and child. However, it cannot be assumed that where a baby has a young mother, he/she also has a young father. In some cases in this study, the father was several years older than the mother. Official statistics suggest that, in almost half of the births to teenage women, the father is not under 20 (ONS 1998).

Even so, it is important to consider the roles of fathers, whether 'teenagers' or older, in the lives of the children and the mother. Four young women were living with the father of their child(ren), and three of these couples had two children. Two further participants were living with the father of their second child, and two were in a non-cohabiting relationship with the father of their child. A further five estranged fathers had regular contact with their children. No other fathers had

contact with their children, including three who were in prison at the time of interview and one who was an in-patient in a psychiatric unit.

We have seen how a key element to 'being a mother' for the young women is responsibility and 'being there' consistently for their child. Many participants, however, depicted a marked contrast between their understanding of parenting and what they saw as that of the father of their child(ren). Asked what the phrase, 'being a father' meant to them, young women in group interviews gave a range of responses, including *'someone to talk to'* and *'he does everything for me'*, to *'nothing'*, *'don't even mention it'* and *'mine hasn't got a father'*. They saw the father as the man who 'does the fathering' and in many cases, this was not the biological father.

Some young men provide considerable and invaluable support, both emotional and material, to their partner and child(ren). It is important to recognise this fully, because 'mothering' is often conflated with caring and nurturing, and presented as a biological given. The existence of some young men who take a full role in parenting provides evidence that parenting roles are socially constructed and that social change can therefore occur. Natasha, for example, described her partner and father of her two children, Robert, as 'a brilliant father'. She added that her partner *'does a lot more work with these two (children) than what I do'*. Robert felt that social services had very negative expectations of him, as a care leaver, and that it was assumed the relationship would not last. Natasha had applied for a job and was awaiting the outcome, and the couple were hoping that she would be able to work while Robert took on most of the childcare. Rachel also described

how her partner shared childcare with her. She stated, *'He's brilliant with her. I don't think I'd ever find a gooder father than him, because like, he knows what she needs... It's amazing'*. Thus, some of the young women praised the role of their partner in parenting. This was, unsurprisingly, particularly the case when they were living with them. These relationships had succeeded over a number of years, through change and adversity.

Unfortunately, this was the experience of only a small minority of young women. The majority felt that the baby's father had not responded to parenthood in the same way as they had, and were highly critical. They felt that, while they had changed in order to take on the parenting responsibilities, young men did not have to do so, and frequently chose not to. Separated partners were heavily criticised but, even where the relationship had lasted beyond the birth of the child, the young women often found they were alone in caring for the baby. The gap between public opinion, which holds that fathers should be involved in childcare, and the reality that women still carry major responsibility for physical and emotional care has been well documented (Pringle 1995) and is borne out here. The expected sharing of parenting and domestic tasks was, according to the young women, rarely forthcoming. In the following lengthy extract from a group interview, four young women discuss the respective roles of men and women as young parents⁴.

Group Three

1. Alison What about 'being a father'? What does that mean?
- 2.
3. Sam [Exhales] Huh! Non-existent! Vanishing. Invisible man!
4. [Laughs] Here's 't door and it's permanently closed! [Laughs]

⁴ This was in response to one of the 'agree or disagree' statements. See Appendix IV, page 296-7.

5. Anna A lad can, at end o't day, can walk away from it, like John's
6. dad
7. [Several voices at once]
8. Alison Away from children or from anything?
9.
10. Anna From anything.
11.
12. Jayshree We're two years older than them. We're two years in front of
13. their age, when we're teenagers.
14.
15. Alison You mean you're more grown up?
16.
17. Jayshree Yeah. Yeah.
18.
19. Sam I'd say ten, not two.
20. [Laughter]
21. Jan Daniel's dad's 19, going on 19 months. Stupid little fucking –
22. they don't want to grow up, men don't want to grow up.
23.
24. Jayshree They don't.
25. [
26. Jan They don't want to face responsibilities. You have to get them
27. at a geriatric, geriatric age for them to make sense!
28.
29. Anna [Laughs]
30.
31. Jan It's right though, innit? [laughing]
32.
33. Alison So what is it that you think makes it harder?
34.
35. Jayshree They still want to play with their cars and things like that.
36. [Several voices at once]
37. Jan Boys and their toys.
38.
39. Alison Are you saying that it's...
40.
41. Jan David's still the same with his car.
42.
43. Alison Are you saying that it's boys that make it harder for girls?
44.
45. Jayshree Yeah. (lads) have it easy.
46.
47. Alison Is that, is that the thing, `cos....
48.
49. Jan Yes because, you sit there, right, and you say 'Yes, fine, we'll
50. live together and we'll have this baby' and then, 'Yeah, we'll

51. live together and we'll have plenty of sex and have this baby,
 52. right', and then, THEY DON'T WANT TO PLAY HAPPY
 53. FAMILIES, 'cos they still want to go out with their friends
 54. and they still want to play with cars and in't meantime you're
 55. going 'Hello!' d'you know. [laughing] 'What about me, and
 56. this baby, that you wanted?' And then you think, 'Well fuck
 57. this (unclear).
 58.
 59. Jayshree It's like they're married to their mates. They're not married to
 60. us, they're married to everybody else.
 .
 .
 61. It's different for boys 'cos they want to, still want to
 62. (unclear), um - have their variety of women, if you want to
 63. say.
 64.
 65. Sam They want to spread their seeds.
 66.
 67. Jan Sow their oats.
 68. [Laughter]
 69. Jayshree Get tied down to a 14-year old lass [unclear].
 70.
 71. Jan But it's not necessarily - men at 35 don't stop with women
 72. at 35, do they, if they've had a kid, it's just they don't want to
 73. face responsibility. It's not their age. They just don't want
 74. that responsibility.

This extract is characterised by considerable agreement amongst the participants, to the extent that they talk as collective subjects, as in 'we haven't had much luck wi' em'. In the final section above, they produce a group discourse, with each comment adding to the previous one (beginning with 'It's different for boys'). This suggests a high level of agreement in their views on fathers.

This view, that young men 'don't want responsibility' is supported by the individual accounts of many participants, who, expecting equality in parenting, had found that they were left to take responsibility and to do the domestic work involved in having a home and children. Several said that their partner had wanted to be with his friends and to have a partner and child as well. These were major

sources of friction and dissatisfaction. Christine similarly described how her baby's father had not met her expectations of shared parenting.

Christine

1. A In the group interview, we talked a bit about, um, fathers, and
2. the role of fathers.
- 3.
4. C They haven't got one [laughs]. That's what I think, anyway.
5. Then you're pregnant you're like a trophy. 'Oh, she's having
6. my baby' and all that. And then when you've got the baby, 'I'll
7. (get in at night)'. You don't see none of that business.
8. //A: Mm// He changed his bum about three times since he's
9. been born, I think. Maybe less. //A: Mm// And bathing him,
10. he's never bathed him once. //A: Mm// Never got him dressed.
11. Some, some fathers are better than others. Like, Kirsty's
12. boyfriend, he is good with the babies. //A: Mm// He'll dress
13. them and feed them, and all that business. //A: Yeah// But mine
14. was just a right arse. Don't know what. Oh, just wouldn't do
15. anything. He did clean up the house and everything, but I didn't
16. need him to clean up. //A: Mm// I wanted him to help me more.

Christine begins with a general remark about fathers, then relates this directly to her own experience of the father of her child. Many young women commented both on their own experience and on their wider opinion of the role of fathers, based on observation of their local community. For example, Nazia remarked, *'I think a lot of them just think it's a, you know, a woman's job to do it, anyway. 'Cos like, nearly everyone that I know is a single parent'*.

Whilst the young women made sometimes quite dramatic lifestyle changes in response to motherhood, men rarely did so. Two young men were exceptions. One stopped committing crime and was in paid work at the time of interview. Another was described as having 'settled down', having previously been regularly 'in trouble'. He was living with his partner and child, and was described as taking a full role in parenting. However, these were isolated cases.

In addition to their remarks about fathers not taking responsibility for parenting, a number of participants talked about men, in some cases the child's father, as a source of considerable stress, violence and abuse⁵. There is limited previous research on violence by the partners of teenage mothers, though Simms and Smith's (1985) study of teenage mothers found that by the time the baby was 14-months old, fourteen young mothers (out of 533) were separated, five because of violence. This does not appear to be out of proportion with estimates of the extent of domestic violence amongst the general population (Stanko 2000). However, the existence of violence in such relationships is significant for two reasons: firstly, because domestic violence in the relationships of young people is rarely remarked upon, and secondly, because it is likely to be a conservative estimate. Simms and Smith note that this is likely to be the case, because no direct questions were asked about domestic violence. This is also the case in this study, because the interviews were semi-structured and focussed on the experience of motherhood. They were asked about the relationship with the baby's father, but violence by partners sometimes appeared to be underplayed by the young women, being mentioned only where it was relevant to another aspect of their story, notably child protection. For example, Louisa mentioned it in describing an exchange with her child's social worker:

Louisa

1. My boyfriend used to beat me up //A: Yeah// when I were pregnant,
2. //A: Mm// and, they turned round to me, when I were living with my
3. mum and dad, that I'd got to leave him, or I'd lose him [i.e. her son].
4. //A: Right// And I turned round to them and said, 'Well, there's other
5. people getting beat up by their boyfriend. Why don't you turn round
6. and say it to them?'

⁵ See also pages 145-6.

It is possible that the stigma attached to domestic violence, allied with concerns over child protection that this may raise amongst welfare professionals, may lead to under-reporting by young women. On three occasions during fieldwork project workers claimed that young women were currently, or had recently been experiencing abuse, but the young women did not mention this when giving reasons for recent separation⁶. Three young women did choose to talk explicitly about the fathers of their children physically abusing them⁷. A further three had lived with a violent partner who was not the biological father of their child, subsequent to becoming mothers. Also, four fathers (one in seven) were not allowed access to their child because of the danger of violence or abuse. In three of these cases, this had been agreed between the young mother and social services, as a matter of child protection. For example, Jayshree commented as follows:

Jayshree

1. He kept trying to get back with me and that, and I found some
2. things out what I didn't like. //A: Mm// Um, which has caused
3. concern for Social Services. //A: Right// So - I couldn't have got
4. back with him even if I'd wanted.

In such cases, attempts to formulate policy and practice to involve fathers in parenting as a matter of policy may be misguided, and indeed, dangerous for the well-being of some children, as there is considerable evidence of a link between men who are the perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse (Ross 1996).

⁶ One said separation was due to her partner's alcohol problem, one said separation was caused by her partner never helping with childcare, and one described how she and her partner were, 'always arguing'.

⁷ One young woman who only took part in a group interview also mentioned violence by her baby's father.

The causes of the rise in levels of lone motherhood have been the source of widespread debate. However, such debates are often framed in terms of why young women *choose* to have children outside of marriage. Campbell argues that it is more appropriate to ask, 'what is it about cultures of masculinity that means men will not cooperate with women and take care of their children?' (1993b: 310). The young women in this study suggested reasons for this lack of cooperation, sometimes drawing on a biological account of gender. For example, in the above extract from Group Three (pages 208-210) a number of reasons are suggested, including emotional immaturity. Another young woman suggested that young men have to work more at bonding with their children, as women have already done so through pregnancy and childbirth. However, others seemed to be criticising power relations and the choices that hegemonic masculinity enables young men to take, rather than biology. They stressed that men *choose* not to take full responsibility for their children, as in Jan's remark above, that, '*they don't want to grow up. They don't want to face responsibility*'. Thus, faced with poverty and subordination, young people's responses take gendered forms. The small amount of power that young men in poor communities have may, in some cases, be turned against those with whom they live (Campbell 1993b).

We have seen how the participants were often highly critical of their children's fathers, but, as Jan states, '*we haven't had much luck wi' em*'. It is also worth noting that many still felt it was worth trying again, with someone who had '*got the guts to do it*' (see page 205). Many were more positive about the parenting undertaken by their current partner, who was a substitute father to their child(ren). Several commented, '*he's taken him on as his own*', and they considered this

partner to be the child's father. Monica stated that, if she put her daughter in the middle of a room with the girl's biological father was at one end and Monica's partner at the other, her daughter would run to her partner. Echoing her view of motherhood as *'being there – no matter what'* (see page 184), she considered her current partner to be the father, since, *'a father is somebody who's there. If he's not there then you can't say "Oh yeah, there's my dad" 'cos he's not there for you'*.

The young women often felt that lone motherhood was not ideal. They saw it as preferable to having two parents who argued, and believed that lone mothers could do a very good job of bringing up children. Nevertheless, this is not the same as seeing lone motherhood as a choice or as a rejection of men in families. Jan felt that her current partner had a particularly important role to play in the life of her son, as well as in providing support for her:

Jan

1. Somebody that can take over when I've had enough. [laughs]. No, I
2. don't know. Somebody to go and play football on't field, to take him
3. places, and like, somebody to play rufty-tuftly with him. I don't know.
4. It's more Daniel. You know, he loves Hannah to pieces, I mean, she's
5. his little sweetheart, but him and Daniel, like, I don't know. It's
6. somebody for Daniel, but, I don't know. Somebody to get up in the
7. mornings and make the breakfast instead of me doing it all the time.

So despite having had very negative experiences with men in some cases, the young women did not see them as redundant in family life. Rather, they saw many men as opting out of family life in which they could have had a valued role – voting with their feet, and sometimes with their fists.

CONCLUSION

The young women's accounts of being mothers are varied and encapsulate many of the features of mothering noted in previous research, including its mundaneness, repetitiveness and the loss of personal freedom associated with it. However, they also discuss gains from motherhood, including a sense of purpose, pride and satisfaction in seeing their children develop.

The young women have been seen to define themselves very largely through their status as mothers. This reflects their major investment of time, energy and material resources in mothering as well, perhaps, as reflecting the limited alternative opportunities and identities available to working-class young women. They are well aware of their responsibilities, and are committed to their children and to giving their children a better start in life than they had had. Whilst political rhetoric talks of young mothers creating a 'cycle of deprivation' (Blair 1999b), many of the young women are either actively engaged in improving their own skills and qualifications, or have plans to do so once their children were older. Many identify with a caring role, reflected in the common wish for jobs in nursing or care work.

The young women also ascribe to mainstream traditional values of heterosexual femininity. A few are so disillusioned with men that they described themselves as much happier as lone mothers. However, such decisions can be seen as rational, given the widespread view that fathers take little role in domestic labour and childcare, and also given the extent of experiences of domestic violence. It is, perhaps, more surprising that the young women retain the desire for the 'perfect

fairy-tale' of marriage and a traditional family unit. Whilst young mothers are often seen as a threat to the nuclear family, the aspirations, at least of the young women in this study, are actually for economic independence, marriage and a family.

The ways in which the young women talk about motherhood cannot be considered in isolation from their context. There are several aspects to this contextualisation, some of which are considered in this chapter, including the socio-economic, biographical and gendered contexts of motherhood and parenthood. Consideration of these contextual features is necessary in order to recognise both the adversity faced by the young women and the coping or survival strategies they employ to negotiate it, whilst at the same time acknowledging that children's needs and interests are not always the same as those of mothers. In this regard, this chapter presents a different reading of the behaviour of 'socially excluded' young mothers from those of hegemonic popular and academic discourses.

Chapter Seven

A Counter Discourse of Teenage Motherhood

It's not on age; it's on responsibility. (Sam)

This chapter explores the impact of popular discourses of 'teenage mothers' upon the young women, and it is argued that the young women's awareness of their positioning in discourse, and of attempts by others to represent them in particular stereotypical ways, runs through their responses. The chapter begins by exploring their perceptions of how they are categorised by others. Hegemonic discourses of teenage mothers, as the young women perceive and experience them, are comprised of several components, each of which is also evident in the newspaper coverage examined in Chapter Two. These are the articulation of teenage motherhood/pregnancy with promiscuity, with instrumental economic dependency, with a lack of respectability and responsibility, and with inadequate and/or abusive parenting.

These discourses have a discernible impact upon the young women's lives, having effects which may be insidious, explicit or, at times, explosive. It is difficult to see how young women who have already had to struggle due to poverty, racism and institutionalisation can develop good self-esteem and self-efficacy in the face of such negative perceptions of their abilities and potential. Furthermore, knowledge that one is negatively perceived by others can shape one's interactions with them, as it means that one has to 'stake a claim' to a particular identity.

In the second section it is argued that the young women negotiate hegemonic discourses through the construction of their own accounts. Some aspects of this

have already been described in the preceding chapters. This chapter explicitly focuses on the different strategies used by the young women to negotiate, resist and refute such hegemonic discourses. It is argued that the young women's accounts both accord with and conflict with hegemonic discourses. Some employ dominant discourses but describe themselves as exceptions and distance themselves from 'other' young mothers. Others overtly counter these dominant representations, either through providing a critique of social conditions, or through employing a discourse in which they both resist and refute the notion that adolescence and motherhood are mutually incompatible and, instead, stress the importance of responsibility over age.

'SLAGS', 'SLAPPERS' AND 'SCROUNGERS'?

In a number of interviews, young women talked directly of being judged, stereotyped, 'looked at' and 'looked down upon', and the ways in which others perceived them seemed to be quite transparent to them. As Skeggs notes, of the working-class women in her study:

They operate with a dialogic form of recognition: they recognise the recognitions of others. Recognitions do not occur without value judgements and the women are constantly aware of the judgements of real and imaginary others. (1997: 4)

In this study, feeling 'looked down' upon was seemingly common. There was also a perception that this was due to the lines drawn in the minds of others concerning those groups for whom it was socially acceptable to be mothers. For example, Louisa remarked that, *'people criticise you when you're a young mum and people criticise you if you get pregnant when you're about 40. You can't win [laughs]. Think it's only when you're in't thirties you're allowed to get pregnant'*. In this

sense, many of the young mothers expressed an awareness of the 'policing' of motherhood (Phoenix et al. 1991; Smart 1992).

'Slags and slappers'?

The work of Lees (Cowie and Lees 1981; Lees 1986) on the discursive policing of young women's sexuality still has relevance more than fifteen years on. In the present study, young women described being categorised as 'slags', 'slappers' and 'tarts' by others, often in public spaces. For example, Nicola described how, when pregnant at 15, other school students would say things like, *'Oh, look at that slag. She's pregnant'*. Carol had found similar attitudes from friends:

Carol

1. One of my mate's pregnant herse:lf. //A: Yeah?// Couple of months
2. ago she was saying to me, 'Oh, I'm never having kids', you know,
3. 'they're for slags'. So like, that made me and her have a bust-up.
4. And then she got pregnant herself!

The remark that children are 'for slags' seems to be a 'given' within the discourse, not requiring any elaboration by Carol. This may be seen as an instance of the use of pre-existing linguistic resources. Within the 'pregnant young woman equals slag' discourse employed by Carol, a binary opposition is created between 'slags' who have children, and other (non-pregnant/mothering) young women. Carol makes her resistance to this discourse clear by stating that it led to the break-up of her friendship, and by pointing out that even those who distinguish themselves so strongly from 'slags' who have children can cross the imaginary binary between the respectable and the 'slag'. Thus, in the presentation of a short anecdote, Carol undermines this discursive link.

Associations of pregnancy with promiscuity appeared to be a common experience, and many young women were keen to counter this association. For example, a question about whether there was anything different about being a mother at a relatively early age sparked a range of responses, including comments concerning a likely lack of material stability and poverty amongst young mothers. However, most focused upon judgmental attitudes towards them:

Karen

1. K I just feel I've just had the most problem, yeah, just from like,
2. outside people. //A: Mm// And people's judgements and stuff,
3. making it, like, harder for me. //A: Yeah// 'Cos at college and stuff,
4. it was difficult, you know. Other, you know, people my age'd find
5. out that I had a little boy, and there was always, you know, nasty
6. comments and stuff like that. So //A:Right// it's been like - quite a
7. - kind of - battle.
- 8.
9. A Yea:h. What sorts of, can I ask what sorts of comments, you had?
- 10.
11. K Oh, oh God. This was, this was in my last year of 'A' level. You
12. know there was like this group, and - you know, they wouldn't
13. say it directly to my face //A: Mm// but you know they'd kind of
14. talk about the subject, but, you know, directing it at me, about, you
15. know, you know, girls that have - kids young, you know, they're
16. sleeping with everybody and that, that kind of like, attitude, as well
17. //A: Right// I think it is that as well that, if you've had a baby it
18. means, you know, you're having sex with everybody.//A: Right//
19. Which wasn't true. You know, I had this one partner. I was with
20. him - for like - it was four years //A: Yeah// , five years, something
21. like that. It was a long time. //A: Yeah// So that makes me angry as
22. well //A: Yeah// because I wasn't sleeping around [laughing]
23. with everybody.
- 24.
25. A Mm. Yeah. So they're assuming that if you have a kid (p)..
- 26.
27. K You're a slag, basically [Laughter] Yeah. //A: Yeah. Yeah// It's
28. one of the stereotypes really.

Whilst Karen is keen to point out that unfair judgements have been made about her, she shows a marked reluctance to provide details, as shown by her response

to a prompt of, 'Oh, oh God'. She then goes on to describe clearly a discursive articulation between having a child when young and promiscuity. Karen immediately counters this argument ('which wasn't true'), apparently feeling the need to state explicitly that this was not the case, and that she 'wasn't sleeping around with everybody'. Her comment in lines 27-8 that 'it's one of the stereotypes' points to her awareness of the various different elements to hegemonic discourses of young mothers.

Nevertheless, the physical presence of a young pregnant woman, or of a young woman pushing a pram, is a visible symbol of female sexuality and reproductive capacity. Whilst this is true of women of any age, this symbolic association of pregnancy and childbirth with sexuality and fertility becomes particularly problematic when the body of the young woman in question is an adolescent one. As Murcott (1980) has argued, where adolescence and reproduction are visibly represented in the same body, this disrupts cultural notions of childhood as a time of pre-sexual innocence. Survey evidence suggests that as up to a third of young women have their first sexual experience by the age of 16 (Kiernan et al. 1998). Nonetheless, young women who *visibly* do not conform to images of 'innocent girlhood' may seem to embody (literally) the opposite and hence to provide a threat. The young women felt that their visibility in public spaces could be particularly problematic, as is vividly illustrated in the following remarks by Emma. These follow directly from her comments reported in Chapter Four (page 129), where she commented that other people would say that the difficulties she found in having children were seen by others as her 'fault'.

Emma

1. A How do you feel about that?
2. [P]
3. E Um – pe:rsnally, I think it's all wrong, //A: Uh huh// because, 'cos
4. you've got children, you get discriminated against. 'Ooh, look at
5. her. Look at that slapper, how she's walking down the str- look at
6. her, with them kids'. You know, you get a lot of digging.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this segment is Emma's representation of the surveillance of young mothers by (unspecified) others. She seems to be having a direct discussion with the 'dialogic judgemental other' (Skeggs 1997: 4). Emma's repetition of the word 'look' (three times in lines 4 and 5) builds a powerful picture of public surveillance. This is enhanced by the use of the phrase 'She's walking down the street' sandwiched between the 'looks', which seems to imply that a young mother should not be visible, and is audacious if she presents herself in public without shame.

Similarly, some young women addressed the assumed equation that pregnancy = promiscuity = children by different/unknown fathers. There is an underlying notion of irresponsibility and dissipation connecting these aspects of the discourse. Only one young woman described becoming pregnant as the result of a 'one-night stand'. Far more typical were comments such as that of Emma, again, whose remarks in the following interaction were initiated by a pause in the interview:

Emma

1. E OH, CAN I JUST SAY THAT //A: Please do// BOTH MY
2. CHILDREN ARE BY THE SAME PARTNER. //A Uh huh// Some
3. people - you know - probably think, some people might think that
4. um, cos, because I've got two children //A: Yes// they're by different
5. people. But they're not. They're by the same person, so //A: Mmm//
6. you know
- 7.

8. A Does that concern you, that people will think that...
 9.
 10. E Yea:h, because I mean when I first caught pregnant for my second
 11. child they kept saying, 'Is it the same person? Is it the same person?'
 12. everywhere I went //A: Right// It was 'Is it the same dad? Is it the
 13. same person?' //A: Yeah// I'm saying, 'Yeah', you know. There was a
 14. lot of that. //A: Really// You know, from - not just, like, the older
 15. generation, um - but you know, friends and that //A: Mmm//
 16. 'Have they got the same dad? Have they got the same...?' I says
 17. 'Yeah, too right they have. What d'you think I am? Some tart?'

Lines 1–5 take the form of a response to an unasked question, suggesting that Emma has entered the research interview with a perception of public discourses which she wants to refute or remould. A short habitual narrative (Riessman 1991) follows the statement that her children have the same father, in which Emma relates events which took place repeatedly over a period of time. As in the previous extract from the interview with Emma, she uses repetition to powerful effect in lines 11, 12, 13 and 16 ('Is it the same person? Is it the same person? Is it the same dad? Is it the same person?'). It is this repetitive questioning that strikes Emma as so insulting, and her response is provided by a hypothetical response: 'Too right they are. What do you think I am? Some tart?' This can be seen as a response within the narrative to the people who are questioning her, but can also be interpreted as a (indirect) response within the interview. Thus, the local narrative provides Emma with a vehicle with which to refute potential (or hidden) accusations of promiscuity.

'Scroungers'?

A second key element to public discourses of 'teenage motherhood' is that of young women getting pregnant deliberately in order to claim extra social security benefits and housing. This manifested itself politically during the 1980s and early

1990s in the 'underclass thesis' (Murray 1990). It is also shown in the political rhetoric of the Conservative government of the 1990s. For example, at the Conservative Party Conference of 1992, Peter Lilley, then Secretary of State for Social Security, spoke of 'young girls who get pregnant to jump the housing queue'.

As in previous studies (Allen and Bourke Dowling 1998; SEU 1999) none of the young women stated that they had become pregnant in order to get council accommodation, although some stated that they believed that this might be true of others. Indeed, the argument is particularly easily undermined in the case of care leavers as they are already a priority group for social housing provision. In fact, two of the three participants who were in children's homes when they became pregnant actually became homeless as a result of pregnancy, due to a lack of appropriate local authority accommodation. In the following excerpt from a group discussion, Charlene describes the way in which dominant discourses of teenage motherhood are embedded in notions of economic dependency.

Group Two

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1. Charlene | It's just a stereotype (....) |
| 2. | [|
| 3. Julie | I don't suppose it matters <u>how</u> old you are really, |
| 4. | cos you're always gonna find it difficult, aren't you? |
| 5. | |
| 6. Charlene | (unclear) |
| 7. | |
| 8. Alison | Mm. (p) So what's, what's the stereotype? |
| 9. | |
| 10. Denise | I think that's (unclear) |
| 11. | [|
| 12. Charlene | Stereo, I'D JUST SAY THE STEREOTYPE to |
| 13. | say, um, young people nowadays, um, get pregnant to be |
| 14. | on the dole, and have a house and all that lot. |
| 15. | |

16. Julie I don't think that, no.
- 17.
18. Charlene Yeah, but that's, that's....
- 19.
20. Denise That's what social (unclear) but it's not.
21. []
22. Charlene That's the ste:reotype.
- 23.
24. Julie Yeah.
- 25.
26. Charlene Not what I say. That's the stereotype.

Charlene's initial description of the 'stereotype', as she sees it, is countered by Julie, who at first seems to think that this is what Charlene actually believes about young mothers. This may be partly explained by group dynamics as Charlene was dominating the discussion to the obvious irritation of others. However, by the end of the extract, all three participants seem to have agreed that this is how others view them. Charlene's repetition of 'that's the stereotype' three times provides emphasis to her distancing of her own beliefs from this stereotype.

In the following illustration of this ‘stereotype’, Emma presents a story of how she sought a home for herself and her baby. Her parents had said she could remain with them, but the house was overcrowded, and she would not have had a room for herself and her baby. This forms a segment within a much longer narrative about her pregnancy and the birth of her two children. The first two lines provide a conclusion to her previous description of her parent’s overcrowded home.

Emma

1. E So there was no way that I could have lived at home //A: Uh huh//
2. no matter what my parents said. //A: Uh huh// Well, my mum and
3. my step-father //A: Uh huh// um, so I thought, Well, I've got to do
4. something about this' //A: Yeah// You know? I've got to get out. I've
5. got to find my own house, //A: Yeah// and I've got to set my own
6. family up. And I did. I went to the council. (p)I mean they weren't
7. too happy about it, 'cos they thought, 'Oh, another teenage mum'.

8. You know 'another teenage pregnancy. She just wants a house'.
- 9.
10. A Did you feel that, when you went there?
- 11.
12. E Yeah, because they kept saying 'Oh, we can't give you anything until
13. you're so-and-so month, you're so-and-so this, you're so-and-so
14. that'. It was only until I went into hospital, with my first child, that,
15. er, with premature labour //A: Yeah// that they decided to give me
16. somewhere. And that was at eight month.

Here we are presented with the dilemma for Emma, of having a family who say they will support her, but knowing that she must set 'my own family up'. The 'complicating action' (in narratological terms¹) (Labov 1972), begins with her going to the council (line 6), and with her description of what she perceived to be the reaction of the housing officers, who, she asserts, saw her as a 'scrounging' teenage mother. In doing so, she appears to be both working within an established linguistic repertoire, and to be providing evidence to counter it. Her use of the phrase, 'another teenage mum' implies an acceptance that there is an epidemic of young mothers. Asked to provide more details, Emma continues by describing the use of stalling tactics by the housing department, which, she believes, is evidence of reluctance to provide housing to young pregnant women.

Respect and respectability

This aspect of the hegemonic discourse of teenage mothers - of 'scroungers' - was a frequent feature of interviews, forming as important an element in the discourse as the conflation of young motherhood with notions of promiscuity. In fact, these two elements sometimes appear to be inseparable, as in the following narrative provided by Denise, who was pregnant at the age of 14. This combines several elements: promiscuity, lack of respectability, and a 'scrounger' mentality.

¹ See page 110.

Denise

1. A We were talking about other people's reactions. They were basically
2. supporting you, yeah?
3.
4. D Mmm. //A: Okay// Used to get little sneers when I was walking
5 down the street.
.
.
6. A From people you knew?, or =
7.
8. D = No. From little old ladies that used to walk about with their
9. shopping trolleys (p). Um, I'd just started showing, and it was an hot
10. day so I thought, well I'm not gonna wear my coat. //A: Mm// Cos
11. normally I could hide it with my coat, 'cos it was big, //A: Mm// and
12. I could hide it, and I thought, well, I'm not gonna wear my coat 'cos
13. it's a hot day. //A: Yeah// So I went out – and there was all these
14. people staring at me and I thought - well, I've got nowt to be
15. ashamed of, I'm pregnant, I'm pregnant. There's nowt I can do about
16. that. //A: Yeah// So - and then this woman turned round and said
17. summat, so I flipped and – my Mum dragged...
18. [
19. A What did she say? Can you tell me?
20.
21. D I can't remember. It was summat about, 'that's what slags do
22. nowadays to get houses' or summat. And then I just flipped, and I
23. said 'I didn't get pregnant to get an house (p) And I didn't get
24. pregnant 'cos I wanted to get pregnant. I got pregnant because I got
25. pregnant' //A: Mmm// And then, my Mum says, 'Come on you', and
26. then she dragged me away. And then she says 'I shouldn't have done
27. that really, should I?' and I says 'No'.(P)

In the orientation² to the narrative (lines 11-13), Denise sets the scene of going out without disguising her pregnancy for the first time. The complicating action builds from others staring, to the remark made by the stranger (lines 13-17). Denise finds it difficult to recall the insult levelled at her, only doing so as a result of a prompt. When she does recall it, it is immediately followed by a refutation of the accusation (lines 22-25), which is strengthened by repetition of the word 'pregnant' four times in lines 24-5, culminating in the evaluation 'I got pregnant because I got pregnant'. The result (which here takes the form of the

² See page 110.

narrator's response) and resolution of the action are anger and indignation. The sense of justness in her confronting the woman and the strength of her anger are implied by her mother's reaction, and by the evaluation that Denise should have been allowed to 'flip'.

The narrative presented by Denise has, at its core, insults that rest on the articulation of notions of promiscuity and economic dependency. These are echoed by the title of an edition of the magazine *Marie Claire*: 'Council Estate Slags' (cited in Skeggs 1997: 3). These two elements seem to be both linked and legitimated within the discourse by notions of irresponsibility and lack of respectability. Skeggs argues that respectability would not be of concern, 'if the working-classes (Black and White) had not consistently been classified as dangerous, polluting, threatening, revolutionary, pathological and without respect' (Skeggs 1997: 1). She further argues that 'respectability has always been a marker and a burden of class' (Skeggs 1997: 3) and that the working-classes have historically been divided into 'rough' and respectable. Indeed, the term 'slag' implies both dissipation and roughness. Some of the metaphors used by the young women in this research study have clear connotations of being judged non-respectable, as in the following examples:

They look at you as though you're crap. Sorry to put it that way, but they do. (Trish)

Other mothers and that, they look at you like pooh. (Rachel)

They think it's disgusting that a young person can have a child, 'cos they're a child themselves (Beverley)

Just because we're rough, doesn't mean we can't be good parents. (Katie)

Beverley's matter-of-fact comment that older people think early motherhood (or perhaps early sexual activity) is 'disgusting' seems particularly striking, as the term 'disgust' implies not just that this is a socially undesirable thing to do but also suggests revulsion, loathing, distaste and offence (Douglas 1966). The other remarks above all employ notions of roughness, dirt, excrement and disgust.

Notions of respect and respectability are also evident in the following excerpt, which follows a narrative segment in which Carol describes how a woman in a supermarket has said, within her hearing, '*that's what slags do for fucking money nowadays*'. In what follows, Carol describes the difference between her social position as a schoolgirl and that of a young mother.

Carol

1. C When I walk down the street, people are, like, looking at me, and
2. when I'm getting on buses, you know, 'You're too young to have a
3. kid. What are you doing on a bus with a kid? We're not giving up
4. our seats for you. //A: Mmm// And I'm like, thinking, you know
5. 'You could have had a kid when you was younger, but we weren't
6. around to treat you like you treat us'. //A Mm// But the respect we
7. get nowadays – it's nothing to what we got when we were at school.
8. We used to get a load of respect when we was at school, and - when
9. we didn't have babies or owt like that.
- 10.
11. A Do you mea:n before you were pregnant? //C: Mm// You got respect
12. just for, just as a //H: Er, um// just for who you were? =
- 13.
14. C = Yeah - And - for how nice I was.

Lines 1-4 are concerned with the ways in which Carol feels treated with a lack of respect by judgmental others. In line 5, her statement that 'you could have had a kid when you was younger' again illustrates Carol's point that there is nothing to mark out young women who become mothers from those who do not, in terms of personal or social characteristics. The contrast drawn by Carol between how she

is viewed now and how she was treated with respect when at school is particularly interesting. Carol's understanding of the reason for this loss of respect is not stated. She goes on to say that it is not just that she has changed, although other people comment that she has become more responsible. However, one possible interpretation of this is that the younger schoolgirl symbolises innocence and industry. The teenage mother, on the other hand, symbolises promiscuity, economic dependency and lack of respectability. In other words, young mothers cannot be 'nice' young women.

Inadequate/abusive mothering

A further key aspect to this hegemonic discourse lies in the association of early motherhood with inadequate mothering. Whilst, historically, girls have frequently had considerable involvement in the upbringing of siblings from an early age, current fears around young mothers appear to hinge upon an articulation of 'youth' with irresponsibility and an *inevitable* inability to cope. As Trish remarked:

Trish

1. It's, like, they say, 'Ooh, I mean, she's a young mum. She don't
2. know how to look after a baby'. But I mean, there's young mums
3. that – look after their kids a lot better than older mums I know. You
4. know what I mean. I cope a lot better than older mums I know.

A particularly vivid narrativised illustration of such concerns is provided by Ebele, who tells a story of a bus journey in which she was drawn into a debate about early motherhood. I asked Ebele a question about stereotyping, seeking to clarify an earlier comment from Ebele about a stereotype of young mothers as single mothers 'living off benefits'. In response, Ebele constructs a narrative in

which she overcomes social stigma and presents herself as ‘doing a good job’ of mothering.

Ebele

1. A We started off, right at the beginning, you said a little bit about the
2. ste:reotype of, //E: Uh huh// of young mums. U:m - have you
3. pe:rsolutely had any experience of that, or have you felt that it's any
4. different being a young mum from the point of view of other
5. people's attitudes towards you?
6.
7. E Um, it's difficult. For instance, um, when I went shopping, I took
8. him shopping the other day, Um - I was quite, um - there was a
9. woman on the bus And she turned round to me, she said, she said the
10. weirdest thing, she said, um, 'Oh, I seriously don't agree with young
11. mums, you know, those under 18, and, blah, blah, blah, it's a
12. good thing you decided to wait'. AND I TURNED AROUND TO
13. HER AND I ASKED 'HOW OLD DO I LOOK?' She said, 'Oh,
14. 22, 23'. And then she just went on, and on, and on, and on, 'I
15. seriously disagree with you', and we, we were having the debate on
16. the bus. And like, the whole ground floor level of the bus just, you
17. know, just intervened, and said, 'Well, you know, pros and cons', it
18. was like a debate team, and I got off the bus and before I got off the
19. bus I said to her, 'You said I look older - You said I looked about 22,
20. 23. I'm seventeen:n'. (p) And then she (looked) gobsmacked, cos she
21. was complimenting me on how the health of my baby was, and how
22. if I was a teen mum I couldn't do it, and I'd be stressed, and I'd be
23. this, and I'd be that. And I turned round to her and I said, 'I'm
24. seventeen:n'. //A: Mm// 'I think I'm doing a pretty damn fine job',
25. //A: Mm// you know. I haven't - got - FINE, I can't afford
26. everything, you know, I can't afford to have my child's - have my
27. child's face on, like, the cover of Vogue, or any baby magazines, or
28. whatever, but this is my child. //A: Uh huh//. You know, he's
29. surviving. That's the most important thing'.

The main part of the narrative starts with the orientation (lines 7–10), where Ebele sets the scene of getting on the bus with her baby and the initiation of the ‘debate’. This leads to the main action of lines 9–29, in which Ebele’s depiction of the ‘bus debate’ over teenage mothers vividly portrays how her day-to-day life has become a source of public interest, controversy and intervention. The debate builds from the initial comments of the woman, to Ebele’s interaction and disagreement. She

is drawn into this partly because of the woman's insistence on making her views known ('she went on and on and on'). This expands into a much wider debate, in which 'the whole ground floor level of the bus intervened' (lines 16–17). The complicating action is followed by the result, in lines 23–29, where the narrator takes action that resolves the situation, and effectively wins the debate. Here, Ebele sets up a contrast between the woman's assumptions about teenage mothers (in lines 19–20, with repetition of 'you said') and the woman's positive comments about Ebele as a mother (lines 20–21). In structural terms, the result also forms an evaluation. Here, Ebele's response to this woman, of 'I think I'm doing a pretty damn fine job' (line 24) can be seen as representing a wider response to a societal or discursive accusation that she is less able to cope than a mother of 22.

In summary, it has been argued that many of the young mothers in this study were aware of hegemonic discourses of 'teenage motherhood', and that these sometimes intruded upon their day-to-day lives and social interactions. Condemnatory comments by others in public spaces illustrate a fear of uncontained female sexuality and economic dependency as central features of the discourse of teenage motherhood. Furthermore, these concepts are articulated through a notion of irresponsibility and lack of respectability. In combination, these elements lead those who have babies in their teenage years to be seen as inadequate mothers and as a threat to the social, economic and moral order.

YOUNG MOTHERS' DISCOURSES OF RESISTANCE

The young women did not simply assimilate hegemonic discourses into their own ways of talking and being. Instead, they told their own stories, some of which subverted, and others that directly countered hegemonic discourses. In doing so, they employed three key rhetorical strategies. The first was to draw on dominant discourses of teenage mothers as self-seeking and irresponsible, whilst positioning themselves as outside of these as individuals. The second was to state the problems of being a 'teenage mother' in material terms, whilst employing an individualist framework. The third was to provide a counter discourse of 'teenage motherhood', primarily through use of the concept of responsibility. The latter was the most frequently articulated, both by groups and individuals and, for this reason, will be discussed here in the greatest depth.

Distancing from 'other young mums'

The first rhetorical strategy involves drawing on dominant discourses of teenage mothers. For example, the young women sometimes commented that it was easier to be a young mother today because there were so many teenage mothers. Whilst this may reflect localised demographic patterns or increased visibility of young mothers, it seems more likely that the 'fact' of an epidemic of teenage mothers has been accepted and incorporated into the young women's own ways of talking about their life worlds. Some participants also commented on how *other* young mothers act irresponsibly, or 'get pregnant to get a house', but drew a clear contrast with their own behaviour, motivations and experience and that of 'others'. For example, Emma contrasted her own responsible behaviour as a mother with that of other (hypothetical) young mothers. This excerpt followed a

question as to whether there was anything different about having children when you are young.

Emma

1. I'm not bothered about my freedom. //A: Mm// At the end of the day,
2. I've got my kids. I've got to look after my kids. My kids come first, not
3. my freedom. Other people see it as, your freedom comes first, then your
4. kids. //A: Mm// You know, 'I'm leave them with so-and-so, so
5. //A: Mm// they can look after them. I'll go out and get drunk. I'll go out
6. and do this. I'll go out and see what lads I can pull'. //A: Mm// I don't
7. see it like that. //A: Mm// You know - it just depends on the individual
8. person. //A: Yeah// I mean, some of my friends think the same as me.
9. Then other people think 'God. I'm going out for a drink. I'm going to
10. the pub. I'm doing this, I'm doing that' - but I don't. //A: Mm// My kids
11. come first. That's all I'm bothered about.

Emma clearly employs a discourse of teenage mothers as irresponsible mothers, who go out drinking and 'pulling lads'. However, she distances herself from this, saying, 'it probably goes to the individual answer'. She then makes a distinction between her own sense of responsibility and commitment, and the promiscuity and irresponsibility of other 'teenage mums'.

Thus, the young women sometimes suggested reasons why *other* young women became pregnant, such as to get a house or money, wanting love and attention, inadequate knowledge of contraception, or 'living for the moment'. This is further exemplified by the following excerpt from a group interview, in which the young women discuss a variety of hypothetical reasons for teenage pregnancy. This was sparked by a discussion in which some of the young women (led by Jan) claimed that, if more help was provided for young mothers, it would encourage teenage pregnancies.

Group Three

1. Jan At end o't day, if you stuck all that help out there it'd
2. encourage more kids to go and get pregnant.
3.
4. Anna Yeah, 'cos one of my mates (said she had a kid) just to get an
5. house [laughs]
6.
7. Alison D'you think people do that?
8.
9. ? Yeah.
10.
11. Anna Yeah, my mate, you know that Beth, that you saw at my
12. house?
13.
14. Jayshree Mmm.
15.
16. Anna She said it.
17. Jayshree (unclear) mesen, and I'm 22.
18.
19. PW Did any of you get pregnant to get a house?
20.
21. Anna No.
22.
23. Sam No.
24.
25. [Laughter] (p)
26.
27. Jan <I could have waited and got an house anyway, without all 't
28. crap, an' all, couldn't I?> I could have waited and got an house
29. without having to change a shitty nappy every couple of
30. hours, and stick summat on my tit, d'you know, like, and go
31. through all that pain. All that pain for a house! I'd want a
32. mortgage for all that pain if I were (going for an house), I'm
33. telling you.
34.
35. Alison So what d'you think are, er, are the reasons why some people
36. have children younger than others? =
37.
38. Jayshree = Cos they don't get any attention what they want from
39. (unclear) (or love or owt like that).
40.
41. Sam Or they just don't know enough about contraception they just
42. don't (unclear) and get caught.
43. [
44. Jan Or they just didn't care. It were just in't
45. heat o't moment and that were (unclear). [laughs]
46.
47. Sam Mmm, 'Oh, you're pregnant'.

This segment begins with group members working within a public discourse, in which young women get pregnant to get a house. Jan then proposes that providing more help to young mothers will only encourage this, and this is supported by Anna's comment that she knows someone who did this. However, the direct question ('Did any of you get pregnant to get a house?') causes the discourse to switch suddenly to a private narrative (Miller 2000), and the idea then becomes perceived as comical. Moreover, Jan's comments imply that it would be quite ridiculous, as a house is little reward for the difficulties of childbirth and mothering ('All that pain for an house!'). Having refuted the suggestion in relation to their own personal narratives, the group discourse shifts once more, in response to a question about the causes of teenage motherhood. Here, they do not appear to be working within a personal discourse as the question and responses relate to 'some people'. Having dealt with the issue of 'others' getting pregnant to get a house, this explanation does not recur. Instead, the young women offer, between them, three reasons, each seeming to build upon the last. The first is the common suggestion that young women (particularly those in care) have a baby for 'someone to love'. The second suggestion is that of lack of contraceptive knowledge. Both of these can be seen as part of a public narrative of 'teenage pregnancy'. The third, however, that they 'just didn't care', can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways. It could be used to support dominant discourses of young women as irresponsible (see Chapter Two). It could also be taken as part of a group discourse of 'deviance', in which this particular group of women talked of having rebelled against authority (see Chapter Eight). Alternatively, it can be viewed as defiance or resistance to the previous suggestions, which rest upon notions of either emotional difficulties or ignorance.

A second strategy employed by young women for distancing themselves from 'irresponsible' or inadequate young mothers involved distinguishing between different groups of young mothers. This sometimes led to tensions between group interview participants, when some stated that mothers of 16 or under would find it difficult to cope, and would need more help and support. This could lead those who had given birth under 17 to defend their mothering abilities. Nevertheless, those who took the former position asserted that very young mothers were still going through 'adolescence' and the process of 'growing up' themselves. For example, Carol commented, *'I wouldn't have been able to do it at 14. I'd still want Mummy and Daddy to do it for me'*. Similarly, Ruth remarked that it is more difficult to be a mother at an early age, and initially attributed this to 'adolescence':

Ruth

1. A D'you think it's er, d'you think it's more difficult?
- 2.
3. R Er, being a mum?
- 4.
5. A Yeah. Or d'you think it's just the same being a mum, at any age?
- 6.
7. R Er (p) yeah, it probably is a bit more difficult, 'cos, like, you always
8. used to like, growing - you know, at the moment, you're like, going
9. through, not adolescence, but you're growing up, aren't you? And like
10. //A: Yeah// you're just starting to learn, well, not learn. I can't easily
11. explain it.
- 12.
13. A You're doing fine.
- 14.
15. R Um, you're like, trying to grow up yourself, //A: Yeah// and you like,
16. have this - fear of a child coming along. //A: Yeah// Er, that's, like,
17. stopped all your freedom really, hasn't it?

In talking about being a 'teenage mother' as particularly challenging, Ruth seems to be talking within dominant discourses. However, there are important

differences between dominant discourses and how Ruth talks about being a young mother. This is evident from what she goes on to say:

Ruth

1. R There's a group going on here this afternoon, and like, there's some
2. young mums there. Rea:lly young. [laughs]
- 3.
4. A Are there?
- 5.
6. R Yeah, and like, one's, 14, one's 15. //A: Yeah// It's just about that
7. age, so.=
- 8.
9. A =Yeah. Yeah. D'you think there's an age at which it's really
10. difficult being a young mum?
- 11.
12. R Not rea:lly, no. If you're about 10, yea:h.
13. [Laughter].

The addition of these remarks suggests that, although Ruth asserts that motherhood may be more difficult for young women and may involve more sacrifices, she does not see this as impacting upon mothering *capabilities*. Neither does she believe that her youth make her an inadequate mother. Whilst the adolescent status of a mother is articulated with a notion of inadequacy and irresponsibility within the dominant popular discourse, this articulation is absent from Ruth's account.

This tendency for young women to differentiate between the varying circumstances of young mothers is also evident in the following excerpt, in which the group participants felt that some young women might need more support, but that 'it depends on your circumstances', rather than solely upon age.

Group One

1. Nicola I think it depends on your circumstances. I mean, at end o't
2. day, age has nothing to do with it, 'cos we've all been young
3. mums and like, none of these are like, battered and abused

4. [laughs], you know what I mean, so. I do think it depends on
5. your circumstances. I mean, everyone said to me at 15, 'Ooh,
6. you'll not be able to bring that kid up', but I (...) thing is I
7. proved them all wrong, you know what I mean, so. (p) It just
8. depends, on where you're coming from, I suppose really.
- 9.
10. Marie Depends whether you've got people supporting you.
- 11.
12. Rachel Yeah.
13. []
14. Ruth Yeah.

As well as being an example of how they differentiate between the individual circumstances of different young women, this is also interesting in that Nicola makes a direct connection, not with inability to cope nor with inadequate parenting, but with child abuse (line 3). The discourse which she feels it necessary to interrupt is one in which young mothers are represented not just as inadequate, but as a *danger* to their children.

Individualist accounts of youth transitions: 'I wish I'd waited'

The second main way in which the young women talked about being young mothers is in keeping with a 'youth transitions' discourse. Here, they stated that there were specific difficulties in being a mother as a 'teenager'. These were attributable to the material circumstances that appear to form an intrinsic part of being young, and to the various transitions which young people have to make. This was usually framed in individualistic terms.

Jayshree

1. Financially, it's not - when you're younger, it's not very good, in a
2. way. It's like //A: Mm// if you're not in college or if you haven't got
3. a job. //A: Mm// (p) You're like, you're a mum, and you're trying to
4. get your career, when you're younger. //A: Yeah// You're trying to
5. help yourself, plus, be a mum as well.

Here, Jayshree focuses on the financial difficulties of being a mother at the same time as trying to complete education or training. It is also interesting that she appears to see self-development and motherhood as incompatible when she states, 'you're trying to help yourself, plus, be a mum as well'.

The young women generally felt that, if they had been older, they would have been more likely to be able to draw on a range of material and educational resources. Poverty was frequently identified as one of the main drawbacks to having your children when young. In addition, they felt they would have been more able to gain paid employment if they had had their children later. Most stated that, while they were very happy with their children and loved them, they wished they had waited until they were older and had more money and security behind them.

Trish

1. I wished I'd - worked and got enough money, put aside,
2. you know what I mean, //A Mmm// for the kids.

Nazia

1. The only thing that er - I think is - the down thing about it is
2. like er, if I - if I could have changed things, I would of waited
3. until, you know, I had a good job, you know, //A: Mm// had my
4. own house. Waited until I was a bit older.

These remarks illustrate how the young women are only too aware of the difficulties in being a mother when young. However, they rarely question whether their poverty, lack of work opportunities, and lack of childcare provision are 'natural' and unavoidable, or have social causes. Instead, they more frequently associate their poverty with life-stage and with the fact that they have not yet made a successful transition to the labour market. In fact they assume that they

would have made a successful transition to the labour market had it not been for pregnancy, whilst in reality, this may not have been the case anyway, given their location in areas of high unemployment and tendency to low levels of educational attainment. However, young people who face poverty or subordination may be unlikely to discuss disadvantage in structural terms, as to do so may suggest that they see themselves as passive victims of circumstance who are unable or unwilling to find their own solutions to difficulties³. Taking an individualistic approach allows the young women to distance themselves from 'other' young women who, they feel, may not be so responsible. However, a further outcome is that they tend to view their poverty as caused by their own choice of having a baby at a young age. They are less likely to be critical of the system that provides lower social security benefits for young people and poor support (including financial support) for young people leaving care.

A further important point to note is that the young women's accounts of how they 'wished they'd waited' can provide a means of resisting the labels of 'slag' and 'scrounger'- that is, of young women who have chosen a life of lone motherhood 'on the social'. Such accounts show how the young women, in fact, work very hard to manage on a low income and to give their children as much as they can from meagre resources. They also show how the young women adhere to mainstream norms, wanting a good job/career and marriage before motherhood. The statement that, 'I wish I'd waited' is used to describe how their own lives have not fitted with this ideal, but that nevertheless, it is what they would have wanted.

³ Similarly, Hutson and Liddy (1994) found that young people often explained homelessness in individual terms, 'simultaneously emphasising their role as conscious decision-makers, with a degree of control over their lives' (190).

The construction of a counter-discourse

As we have seen, most participants employed an individualist approach in discussing their lives as young mothers. However, there were points at which they explicitly resisted dominant discourses of 'teenage mothers', either by drawing on a social critique, or by resisting notions of youth equalling incompetence or irresponsibility. Criticisms of social conditions were more likely to be voiced in group interviews, as in the following excerpt:

Jan, Group Three

1. Yeah, but it's just a big circle, innit. It's like - you get pregnant, people
2. think you want an house. You get an house, right, then, you have to go
3. on't dole, cos there's no, there's no - you tell me where there's
4. childcare facilities in town if you want to go out to work. There in't
5. any! <Or they cost an arm and a leg so you've got to get an high paid
6. – you tell me where there's an high paid job when you've got no
7. qualifications?> It's not - and then dole don't pay you enough anyway,
8. d'you know, you just go round in one big circle, at end - it is honestly,
9. it's rich are keeping - rich are getting richer and they're keeping us
10. poorer, I'm telling you. It's all wrong.

Here, Jan explicitly counters discourses of teenage pregnancy, arguing that they are wrongly labelled as getting pregnant to get a house and seeking a life 'on the social' (i.e. on welfare benefits). She then goes on to describe the difficulties she has found in trying to return to work – one voiced by many others. As we saw in the above discussion of individualist accounts of youth transitions, many young women described wanting to work once their children were of school age, but faced barriers due to a lack of affordable and trustworthy childcare.

A further way in which the young women explicitly resist discourses of 'teenage mothers' as inadequate parents is through challenging the discursive link between age and responsibility. This particular rhetorical strategy can be contrasted with

the strategy of distancing themselves from ‘other young mums’, described above. Here, the participants asserted that age had little or nothing to do with the experiences and coping abilities of parents. On the contrary, many felt that ‘being responsible’ was much more significant than biological age, and that these factors were not correlated. For example, Denise argued that younger mothers may have more patience and employ less punitive parenting techniques than some ‘older’ parents:

Denise

1. A Do you think there are any differences in being a mum when you’re
2. young?
- 3.
- 4 D No. Than a mum when you’re older?
- 5
- 6 A Yeah.
- 7
- 8 D No. No way. (P) You can still look after a child, at whatever age you
- 9 are. //A: Uh huh// And to be quite frank, I think I’m a better mum, mum
- 10 than some of these old parents. (p) ’Cos you see some of these old
- 11 parents going round (unclear) in town, smacking their kids. But you
- 12 don’t see young parents doing that, do you? So.
- 13.
14. A D’you think there’s a reason for that?
- 15.
16. D I don’t know. (p) It’s probably ’cos they’ve been brought up different
- 17 time, or summat. But I don’t know, but you don’t, you don’t see a lot
- 18 like that. //A: Mm// (P) And I think the younger mums look after their
- 19 children better (P) but (p) it all depends, some, some teenagers don’t
- 20 look after their kids, but //A: Mm// and also, some old parents don’t
- 21 look after their kids. //A: Mm// And then there’s some teenagers that
- 22 look after their kids, and there’s some old people that look after their
- 23 kids.

In the first part of this excerpt, Denise breaks down the automatic association between being young, on the one hand, and ‘not looking after your kids’, on the other. In another discussion on this subject, this time in a group interview, this association was further questioned. Prior to the exchange shown below, Jayshree

had said that she felt that some young parents, particularly those under 16, might need more help than other parents. In response, Jan and Sam argue that age and maturity are not coterminous:

Group Three

1. Sam There might be, like, a 14-year old a hell of a lot more mature
- 2 than a smackhead that's just had a kid. D'you know what I
3. mean? It's right though, innit?
- 4.
5. Jan It depends how responsible a person is.
- 6.
7. Sam? Mm.
- 8.
9. Jan And how grown up they are.
- 10.
11. Alison So you don't think age has much to do with it?
- 12.
13. Sam No.
- 14.
15. Jan No. I think if you put all that help out there it's going to
16. encourage more [unclear]
- 17.
18. Jayshree I do. [unclear]
- 19.
20. Alison [To Jayshree] You - so you do think it makes a difference?
- 21.
22. Jayshree Mm.
- 23.
24. Sam Yeah, but at end o't day, Jayshree, you've been in care,
- 25 you've seen like, somebody who's had their kid young, they
- 26 could turn out brilliant, but you see, like, 32 year olds that
- 27 don't give a crap about their kids (unclear).
- 28.
29. Jayshree (unclear)
- 30.
31. Sam Yeah, but they could know more that somebody that's 32 –
- 32 that's on drugs and that. It's not on age, it's all on
- 33 responsibility.

There are several competing viewpoints here. The first comes from Jayshree, who states that younger mothers may need some support. Jan's response is concerned with the principle of helping young mothers, who, she argues, should take full

responsibility for their own actions and circumstances. Sam's contribution is a challenge to the notion of young mothers needing different treatment from other parents. Sam sees the provision of more help to younger mothers as implying that they are less capable, and it is this assumption that she challenges. Her assertion that 'it's not on age, it's on responsibility' stands in opposition to dominant discourses of adolescent development but was expressed by most participants, who felt that experience of childcare, in addition to willingness to take responsibility, was considerably more important than age.

Similarly, the young women saw 'growing up' as contiguous with becoming a mother. As we have seen, they felt that becoming a mother had changed them profoundly. Whilst this would no doubt be true of any group of mothers, the young women linked the change to a new-found sense of responsibility and, hence, emotional maturity.

Group One

- | | | |
|-----|--------|---|
| 1. | Nicola | I think people don't realise that if you're young when you |
| 2. | | have a kid it hits you, don't it? |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | ? | Mm. |
| 5. | | |
| 6. | Nicola | You realise that you've got to grow up |
| 7. | | |
| 8. | ? | Yeah. |
| 9. | | |
| 10. | Nicola | You haven't got any choice. |
| 11. | | |
| 12. | ? | Yeah. |
| 13. | | |
| 14. | Nicola | Because I mean everyone used to say to me, 'Ooh, but you |
| 15. | | like going ice-skating and cinema and never coming away |
| 16. | | 'til eleven o'clock at night. When I were pregnant that was it. |
| 17. | | That all stopped. And I think that a lot of people think that |
| 18. | | 'cos you're young, you can't give up the things you like |
| 19. | | [unclear] Like it gets pushed against you all the while, I think. |

- .
- .
20. Amanda I think you have to grow up when you've got a kid. You
21. can't just go out when you want.
- 22.
23. Marie It's just one of those things, you do have to grow up.

'Growing up', for these young women, consists of the ability to consistently be there for someone else. The frequent remark, 'you have to grow up when you have a kid' is suggestive of a rite of passage: of entry into adulthood through motherhood.

The young women saw responsibility as a way of establishing their adult status, which had already been initiated for the care leavers by the need to make an abrupt or accelerated transition into 'adult' responsibilities on leaving care. However, we saw in the previous chapter that young mothers may have to stake a claim to the identity of 'mother'. Equally, they may have to emphasise their responsibility as mothers. Otherwise they may be assumed to be irresponsible, since adolescence and irresponsibility are closely articulated in dominant discourses of youth. Thus, the young women have to overtly interrupt this articulation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined how, within dominant discourses of 'teenage motherhood', complex interlinkages between conceptualisations of gender, youth and class lead pregnant and mothering young women to be seen as promiscuous, dependent, lacking in both respectability and responsibility, as 'slags' and 'scroungers'. The young women challenge such discourses through employing a

number of discursive strategies, which enable them to resist dominant discourses of 'teenage mothers'. Some young women use a strategy of distancing themselves from other young mothers, asserting that others act irresponsibly and contrasting their own behaviour, experience and views on motherhood with these hypothetical 'others'. At other times, young women discuss the difficulties of being a young mother whilst going through other important transitions. In describing these, they demonstrate their determination and their desire to give their child a better start in life. However, in many cases such transitions are described using an individualist approach, in which they state that they wish they had waited before having a child, because of the poverty that they and their children have to face. On occasions, a social critique is evident, where young women argue that they would love to work but that the policies and practices that would allow them to do so – particularly safe and affordable childcare – are unavailable. Finally, many young women strongly resist dominant discourses of 'teenage mothers' as too young to be responsible for a child, through questioning the assumed link between age on the one hand and maturity or responsibility on the other. This key strategy is one of stressing the centrality of responsibility over chronological age. However, as we shall see in the following chapter, this latter way of understanding the experience of being a young mother conflicts with discursive practices around young mothers, particularly for those who have been in care. The contrast between young women's own understandings and those of others, including professionals, has profound implications for the services they are offered and which they feel able to utilise. For services to be effective in both providing support for young mothers and their children, the perspectives of young mothers need to be listened to and acknowledged.

Chapter Eight

Young Mothers After Care

If you've been in care they expect you to fail. End of story. (Jan)

Some young women were very positive about the professional support they had received. However, most felt that they were expected to be unable to cope as mothers and this created a conflict with the meanings of motherhood and mothering for the young women themselves. Whilst this was the case for many of the young mothers generally, it was further compounded for those who had been in care. For them, a further component to this assumed inadequacy was that they were considered more likely to face insuperable emotional and behavioural difficulties, and that these would impact negatively upon their children. Discursive practices around teenage motherhood and young people in care result in low expectations of their coping ability and often in increased surveillance. This, combined with poor material provision and support for young people leaving care has very real consequences for the lives of the young women and their children.

This final analytic chapter considers the experiences of care leavers, focusing on their accounts of their interactions with professionals. The chapter addresses the question of how the meanings of motherhood relate to the experience of having been in care. The legacy of the care system for the participants is evident on several levels. Some talk about the emotional legacy both of being in care and of leaving care. This is apparent at various points in their accounts, as we have seen in preceding chapters. However, this chapter concentrates on this legacy in terms

of how the young people are viewed by others and the implications for professional support. The first section considers the participants' views on how young people in care are constructed in public discourse. The second section examines their accounts of the implications of such discourses for practices around care leavers and, more particularly, for those who become young mothers.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE: 'TROUBLE' OR 'TROUBLED'?

Hegemonic discourses of teenage mothers combine with discourses of young people in care to intensify surveillance of their mothering. Care leavers may require additional support, not least because they are less likely than other young people to have support from birth families. However, there is a tendency to construct young people who have been in care as either 'trouble' or 'troubled'. Support services for care leavers are inadequate, and young people may be 'lost' to statutory support services on leaving care, becoming invisible in terms of their own support needs. However, if they become parents or are involved in the criminal justice system, they are no longer lost, but may be constructed as particularly 'dangerous' youth, especially in need of surveillance.

Most of the young women felt that they did have difficulties with which they sometimes needed support, and where vulnerable young women are also mothers, their own difficulties may also, in some cases, lead them to need support with caring for their child. Nevertheless, some felt that the automatic elision of being in care with being 'trouble' was both a marker of difference and provided legitimacy for surveillance, rather than support for them as individuals and as mothers. This was not only their experience of interactions with statutory services (including

social services and school), but also with friends and acquaintances. For example, Yvonne explained her reasons for never having liked her children's home: she found it too strict, she felt she could say nothing without it being documented and therefore public knowledge amongst staff members, and because of the label it produced of being 'trouble'.

Yvonne

1. Y People at school, people who see you going into the children's
2. home, they know //A: Yes// it's a children's home. They all say
3. that people from the children's home have got serious problems
4. //A: Mm// And it's like, they don't understand it's that, it's the
5. parents that don't want you, not to say we've got serious
6. problems //A: Yeah// it's the parents that say, 'Oh, we can't take
7. these kids. //A: Yeah// We need a break', or 'We just can't have
8. them in our lives'. //A: Yeah// And it's like, I used to try telling
9. people, 'Don't think I'm in a children's home, that I'm full of
10. problems, //A: No// I will give problems'.
- . .
- . .
- . .
11. A Yeah, so people - kind of - get a picture of you, just because
12. they know...
13. [
14. Y Just that, as trouble, trouble, trouble. Even in school
15. like - they all used to know, yes, we come from a Children's
16. Home. //A: Uh huh// And it's like, they always used to think that
17. we've got problems, even me and my brother. //A: Yeah// They
18. used to (say) that we've got problems. Yes, we did have
19. problems, but we don't show people that we've got problems.

Yvonne uses repetition of the word 'trouble' to mark how she was *consistently* expected to *be* trouble. She then uses repetition of the word 'problems' but this time to mark a contrast between the views of others (that she and her brother are 'troubled') and her own perspective: that being 'troubled' does not automatically lead her to be 'trouble'. Yvonne finds herself in a paradox here, as her overall narrative describes a lifetime of suffering, due primarily to sexual abuse and to

rejection by her mother. She has described how this led her to drug-taking and to outbursts of violent anger during her teenage years. However, what she appears to be objecting to here is the automatic assumption that she will cause trouble *because she has been in care*, divorced from an understanding of her biography and of the reasons for her distress.

Such views of young people in care go beyond the school gates. The following quotation from Rachel suggests that children and young people can be seen as 'contaminated' by the acts of their 'non-respectable' parents. The following extract was part of a longer discourse unit, in which she described how she felt that it was more difficult to be a mother as a teenager, especially 'if you've got no support' or have been in care. She then described her own experience of being in care for six months, when her parents went into a drug rehabilitation clinic:

Rachel

1. When my mum and dad went, I'd got no family at all, cos like, my
2. Grandma and Granddad and that didn't want to know me. (p)
3. D'you know what I mean? Cos like, they thought, 'Oh, your mum
4. and dad's dirty. They've done this, they've done that'. And like,
5. people looked at my mum and dad for things like that. And then
6. like, I suppose we get all, All 't mess from it after, cos they think,
7. 'Oh, like mother, like daughter' innit?

As in the accounts of discourses of teenage motherhood (Chapter Seven), there is a sense of social pollution in the phrase 'Oh, your mum and dad's dirty' (lines 3-4). This echoes Rachel's previous remark that, 'other mothers and that, they look at you like pooh' (page 229). It is also interesting to note again the use of the concept of being 'looked at', which was a recurring theme in the discussion of discursive practices around teenage motherhood (see page 219). Here again, there seems to be a sense of approbation and judgement contained in the phrase 'people

looked at my mum and dad for things like that (line 5). This appears to be part of surveillance, that is, being subject to the judging and potentially controlling ‘gaze’ of others, leading to self-surveillance. There is also an expectation of cycles of neglect/abuse suggested in the phrase, ‘like mother, like daughter’.

This sense of being the object of social scrutiny is also strongly portrayed by Ebele who again asserts that care leavers are assumed to be ‘troubled’ and therefore likely to fail, particularly in parenting. The following comments from Ebele were initiated by a question about whether there was anything different about being a young mother as a care leaver. The following extract combines discourses of care leavers as ‘troubled’ with discourses of ‘teenage motherhood’, as Ebele constructs an argument about the sense of inevitable failure with which others view her mothering:

Ebele

1. It's um, fine, through no fault of my own, I was in care. But it's like,
2. people automatically think, oh, because you've been in care, you're
3. gonna be a bit messed up in your head, and if you have a child, you
4. won't be able to cope. That's, you know, the automatic stereotype, like
5. a game of dominoes, you do this, this will happen, this will happen, this
6. will happen. It's not even, not only social services, (it's) people
7. generally around me, who know that I've been in care. Not a lot of my
8. friends know that I've been in care, but people around me who know
9. that I've been in care will automatically think, 'Oh, she's incapable of
10. X, Y, Z, so therefore she can't do A, B, C'. (...) From family, to
11. friends, to, to the guy next door, you know, like, I have to prove to
12. myself, that I am capable.

In this extract, Ebele employs a number of linguistic devices to convey a sense of inevitability and predetermination in the expected life course of young people in care. This is achieved firstly through metaphor, as in the game of dominoes in lines 4-6. It is also achieved through repetition at various points of the word

'automatic' (lines 2, 4 and 9) and of the phrase 'this will happen' (lines 5–6). The use of the letters of the alphabet (line 10) completes the sense that others expect one thing to lead inexorably to the next. Finally, the sense of social surveillance is conveyed by the gradual widening out of the people to whom Ebele feels the need to prove herself, from the private to the public in line 10-11 ('From family, to friends, to the guy next door'). Like Yvonne, Ebele appears to be objecting to the apparent inevitability of her failure, in the eyes of others, placing her under massive pressure to be 'perfect' in her parenting, by the standards of others.

Ebele also touches upon a further aspect to this discourse of young people in care – that it is sometimes assumed that they enter care because of something they have done, such as criminal activity or behavioural disturbance (CLA 2001). This is evident in the first line of the above segment, where Ebele states, 'through no fault of my own, I was in care'. This aspect is elaborated upon by Nazia:

Nazia

1. A Overall, would you say you were, kind of happy with the way things
2. have gone for you? Is there anything that you'd change? (...)
- 3.
4. M Well, it's changed, changed me, er.. //A: Yeah// er, you know, since
5. I've been into care, like, a lot of people just er, like, from the area
6. where I lived in Redford, everyone, you know when people hear that
7. you've gone into care, they think it's for something that you've done,
8. you know, like, and I get called names for it. I still do. //A: Do
9. you?// Even off people that don't even know me.
- 10.
11. A Because they know that you've been in care?
- 12.
13. M Yeah. But the - people know why I've been in care as well, and er,
14. they don't want to believe it. So, I get called, I always get called,
15. even off people that I don't know (...) I think that's the bad thing
16. about it, you know, people judging you by, //A: Yeah// just by you
17. going into care.

Nazia begins with a general remark about motherhood having changed her. However, she then focuses on the ways in which she has been treated by others as a result of going into care (line 7: ‘They think it’s for something that you’ve done’). Furthermore, she then comments that she is judged by others who know the reason why she was placed in care¹, and ‘don’t want to believe it’. Thus, the judgement of others appears to be linked both to the fact that she has been in care, and to their refusal to believe the reasons for her entry into care. Both aspects of this amount to blaming the victim. Both Ebele and Nazia are from minority ethnic backgrounds². As young people from ethnic minorities are over-represented in the care system, the increased surveillance of their behaviour, and particularly of their parenting, adds to a wider tendency for black young people to be pathologised.

PRACTICES AROUND YOUNG MOTHERS WHO ARE CARE LEAVERS

While public judgements of this kind may stem from ignorance and a cultural denial of the extent of abuse, such discourses also have implications for institutional and professional practices in relation to young mothers who have been in care. Care leavers may face difficulties stemming from past trauma, neglect or abandonment and from years of disruption and dislocation whilst in care. However, rather than viewing past trauma as a reason to set in place additional support mechanisms which are sensitive to the needs of individual young women and their children, services tend to focus on child protection.

¹ Nazia had been a witness for the prosecution in a criminal case against her father.

² Ebele identified as Black African, and Nazia as Pakistani.

Where the mother is young, and particularly if she has been in care, low expectations of her ability to be a 'good enough' mother may precede her and may result in a regulatory and sometimes punitive focus upon her mothering. As Miller states, 'the medical gaze switches swiftly from the mother to the baby in the post-natal period' (2000: 19). In the case of these young women, it is the professional gaze more widely that impacts upon their lives and experiences. In particular, it is the shift in the *interventionist* gaze of professionals that has the most impact upon their lives. This can, in certain cases, set up a situation in which a young person's experience of having been in care is taken as evidence of their risk to their own child. The young women themselves were only too aware of this. Many felt strongly that, as a result of their youth and their known care history (which is itself a selective text and therefore a construction), they were expected to fail at parenting, as well as more generally.

Although some of the young women recognised and appreciated the concern of professionals for the welfare of their child, in many cases they felt that, even if they asked for help, they were unlikely to receive it. Moreover, many feared that they must keep out of the spotlight of professional surveillance or else run the risk of losing their child. As Maynes and Best note, 'there is little space for a woman who is in need of therapeutic help unless it is in relation to the perceived success or failure of her mothering'. (Maynes and Best 1997: 125). Women who have the least resources are those to whom the least is offered, and who are most demonised in the media (Maynes and Best 1997; Kelly 2000).

The participants seemed to clearly recognise that parenting can be difficult and

that some people might be unequal to the task. However, what they objected to was the frequent assumption that youth and/or a 'care history' would *automatically* impact negatively upon their ability to act responsibly and to provide their children with love and care. Such social determinism negates the fact that the effects of particular life events are not entirely predictable (see Henriques et al. 1998³). As Maynes and Best point out,

what is surprising and moving to behold is women who have experienced such severe and prolonged denial of their very selves engaging in the struggle to recognise that things can be different, both for themselves and for their children. (Maynes and Best 1997: 126)

In the present study, a significant minority of the children of the participants had social workers and some had been on the child protection register. Six children from three families had been in care at some point, including two children from one family who were in care at the time of interview. The mothers and fathers of these children were all care leavers. Three of the eight young women who were not care leavers had social workers assigned to their children. In two of these cases, this was primarily due to the fact that the mother was under 16 at the time of childbirth.

Fears of child protection investigations appear to have been significantly lower amongst the sub-set of mothers who had not been in care, than amongst the care leavers. Interestingly, only two participants felt that they had received insufficient *contact* with social services as young mothers. One of these had been in care and had a child with severe disabilities. The second had no care history and felt that

³ 'Although psychoanalysis stresses that particular life events have effects on the psychic development of individuals, particularly in the early years through the family constellation, these effects and their implications are neither entirely predictable nor reproducible' (Henriques et al 1998: 205).

she needed more support and advocacy as a young mother. A third reported that her own mother felt that her grandson, who was registered as a child 'in need', had received insufficient input from social services. In contrast, many of the young women themselves felt that they had received insufficient *support*, but sufficient contact.

Some of the care leavers had not seen a social worker since leaving care. For example, Moira described how *'some social workers, if you've been in care, and you're a young parent, some people here say they've had social services coming to their house and checking up on them. But I haven't had social services coming to my house and checking up on me'*. Beverley had also had no contact with social workers since leaving long-term foster care.

In contrast, Nicola had had considerable contact with social services since giving birth at the age of 15 and subsequently being in a violent relationship. However, she was very positive in her evaluation of the support she had received, describing her social worker as having been like a mother to her. This shows the diversity of experiences of social services amongst the young women. However, in many ways Nicola's case was unusual, and many participants recalled much less trustful or supportive relationships with social workers. Overall, most care leavers felt strongly that social services staff had low expectations of what they could achieve in life, including parenthood.

Social workers sometimes appear to have been understandably concerned at whether a young woman who was, for example, a drug-user, had a criminal

record, or had a history of self-injury could offer a child sufficient stability and consistency of care. However, young people's interpretations of their own actions and behaviour whilst in care sometimes contrasted markedly with those of professionals. Young women often interpreted their actions when in care as a means of coping with a difficult situation. They also argued that there is pressure to 'fit in' in residential children's units, and that being 'in trouble' can become normalised there.

In the following group discussion, the participants look back at their time in care and discuss this culture of being 'in trouble'. This discussion was sparked by a story told by Jan about how her neighbour had contacted social services alleging that Jan had left her toddler home alone, leading to a visit from social services. Jan felt they had taken the allegation more seriously than they might otherwise have done because she had been in care, and had been 'in trouble'.

Group Three

1. Jan We've all been in trouble when we were in care, cos that's
2. something you do when you're in care, innit.
- 3.
4. Sam Not me.
- 5.
6. Jan Fuck off! [Laughter] This comes from, we walked (...) we
7. walked through town us, with 'Tarts' - with 'Tarts of
8. Chipperton' printed on us head, at what? - we were about
9. 15, something like that. Pinching umbrellas. And we
10. were only 13!
- 11.
12. Alison So why do you think...why d'you think – you're saying
13. everybody in care gets in trouble?
- 14.
15. Jan Cos it's just =
- 16.
17. Sam = They do.
- 18.
19. Alison They do?

20.
 21. Sam Oh aye.
 22.
 23. Jan Because =
 24.
 25. Alison [To Anna and Jayshree] = Is that your experience?
 26. Everybody in care gets in trouble?
 27.
 28. Sam You weren't in kids homes were you though, Jayshree?
 29.
 30. Jayshree Well, I were in, but I were in too young to get into trouble.
 31.
 32. Anna (We had drugs)
 33.
 34. Alison You did?
 35.
 36. Anna Mmm. And (it were in't), bedroom upstairs! [laughs] We
 37. barricaded ourselves in, 'til we'd took it all!
 38.
 39. Sam We spent most of our days in Beech Grove, me and Jan
 40. [Laughter]
 41. Alison What's Beech Grove?
 42.
 43. Sam, Jan Police station.
 44. [Laughter]
 45. Jan Till I got moved.
 46.
 47. Sam Our taxis were them little Pandas.
 48.
 49. Jan We used to shout them at end o't road.

This excerpt is shot through with a sense of bravado and defiance. Being in trouble when in care is taken as something that 'everybody does' and the young women describe how this was normalised at the time. However, the laughter (lines 36, 40 and 44) and exclamations (lines 10, 36 and 37) accompanying these stories suggest that they now consider such behaviour out of the ordinary. The following excerpt follows directly on from the previous one, and here the discussion moves to the young women's explanations for offending and getting into 'trouble'.

Group Three

50. Alison Why was that?

51.
52. Jan Because if you're not in wi't crowd, you don't fit, and you
53. get picked on. =
54.
55. Sam = No, at end o't day, you've got nothing to worry about.
56. There's no parents at home saying,
57. [
58. Jan There's no restrictions.
59. [
60. Sam 'Well, what you been
61. doing? What you been robbing for?' If I come back in a
62. police car, with bail forms and that, it's like, 'Oh, again'.
63.
64.. Jan Yeah. And it's like, if I got up at twelve o'clock at night and
65. decided I wanted to go out, there's nowt they could have
66. done to stop me.
67.
68. Anna No.
69.
70. Sam It were like (unclear).
71. [
72. Jan They couldn't make me go to school, so I didn't
73. go. End of chat. Nobody else went, so I weren't, and I stopped
74. in bed all day.
.
.
75. Jan I'm right cynical , I don't like - I'm right cynical me, anyway.
76.
77. PW Did you not think the workers cared about you? 'Cos =
78.
79. Sam = No, I don't =
80.
81. Jan = At end o't day they get paid for doing a job, and that's why
82. they do it.
83. [
84. Sam Well, some of them, Jan, some of them did care, but their
85. hands were tied. There were nowt they could do.

In this extract, Jan initially sees getting into 'trouble' as due to peer pressure and the fear of bullying, whilst Sam focuses on the lack of constraints on their behaviour. From line 58 onwards, Jan takes a similar position to Sam. The key constraint on behaviour they identify is disapproval by people who care. As they are describing an environment in which they believe nobody cares, they feel there

are no social constraints on what they could do. Furthermore, where the culture is such that truancy is the norm, there is little motivation for going to school. This was not so much the case for Anna and Jayshree. Jayshree lived in a long-term foster placement, whilst Anna did feel that most of the staff in the children's home in which she lived did care. According to the young women, these factors made the difference.

However, the participants contradicted the view that they cannot change or break out of inter-generational patterns of abuse or neglect. For instance, in Chapter Five, we saw how several young women had moved into an area where they knew no-one, in order to break away from groups and subcultures in which they had become enmeshed. We have also seen how some had made major lifestyle changes around the time of giving birth. In addition, several spoke of consciously working to give their child(ren) a better start in life than they had experienced.

Whilst young women frequently saw being 'in trouble' as a way of surviving and fitting in with the culture of the residential home, they often found that such behaviour was interpreted by professionals within social services as indicative of individual disturbance, pathology or deviance. For a number, this had long-term implications. When they came to leave care, and particularly when they became pregnant, it was assumed that they did not have the capacity to break out of chaotic lifestyles and patterns of behaviour which would be likely to impact negatively upon a child. Some felt there were powerful expectations that they would continue a 'cycle of abuse'⁴, going on to abuse or neglect their child if they had faced such maltreatment themselves. For example, Beverley commented that,

⁴ See also pages 18-19.

'because of my being fostered they'll most likely expect me to do what my mum did to me and my brother. Which is why I get a bit paranoid about it'.

In another interview, Robert and Natasha, care leavers with two small children, discussed the tendency for young parents who are care leavers to have their children placed in care. This followed a longer commentary, primarily by Robert, concerning the way in which they put *'101 per cent effort into bringing up our children'* partly because of having been in care. The negative experiences they had had, he argued, led them to be more aware of the need to pay attention to childcare and to make sure their own children had a 'happier life'. However, Natasha pointed out that their own perspective contrasted with dominant perceptions of young parents who are care leavers.

Natasha and Robert

1. N There's a lot of people that are in care that have children, and their
2. kids end up going into care, so a lot of that happens. And there's a
3. lot of
4. [
5. A Why do you think that is?
- 6.
7. R Because of them being in care themselves and being - and not being
8. [unclear] enough. Not given the right support. A lot of the time
9. they're given the wrong support, so they're unhappy and depressed,
10. isn't it? Do you think? [To Natasha]
- 11.
12. N (p) Not in all cases, no. =
- 13.
14. R = Not in all cases. Some people are just bad enough parents, and
15. they're just - not good enough. You know, some people just aren't
16. meant to be parents.

Here, Natasha and Robert present two explanations. The first relates to the lack of adequate support to sort through difficulties. However, Natasha comments that

this is not always the case, leading to agreement by Robert, who asserts that some individuals simply are not 'good parents'. Whilst they do not state here what they mean by a 'good parent', elsewhere in the interview, they indicate that a 'good parent' is one who is committed to being a parent, is consistently there for their child, and who provides the child with love and support.

In the next extract, Natasha and Robert describe how some young people, particularly those who are seen as 'troubled teenagers' are sometimes treated punitively rather than supportively. This forms part of a much longer discussion in which they argue that residential care workers rarely have an understanding of what it is like to be in care (cf. page 203). They argue for the need to listen to young people and, wherever possible, to approach them with understanding and support rather than condemnation.

Natasha and Robert

1. R Mm. (P) Like, everybody – that's what it is, people go in care, and
2. they've got their problems, right. It's come from their background,
3. how the people are.
4. [
5. N Some people deal with them in different ways. Some people can
- 6 be violent with their problems - not violent, but have an attitude with
8. their problems, and...
- 8
- 9 A Yeah
- 10
- 11 R And cause crime and stuff like that. //A: Yeah// Some people you
- 12 can't help. Some people they've got that far depressed and down 'cos
- 13 they haven't been helped at the very beginning when they needed it.
- 14 //A: Yeah// That's a lot of it. People are crying out for the help and
- 15 they're not given it. They just think, 'Oh they're just trouble
- 16 makers' and don't give them it.
- 17
18. A So are you talking about little kids?
- 19.
20. R Yeah, that's how it starts. That's when it all, that's when it all starts,

21. with kids. If they're brought up the wrong way – right, by their
22. parents, right, and then they end up in care, and then they have
23. children, they want to give their child a better life than what they've
24. had themselves. And fair enough, social services make it harder for
25. them, cos they stick their nose in, and, they've got all their opinions.
26. Even people who don't even have kids in social services, they think,
27. well, we know how you should bring up a child, and they don't even
28. have kids themselves, so, they need to change that.

The majority of the care leavers felt that they had been treated differently from other young people by social services, in ways they felt were counter-productive. For example, in a group interview with nine young women, two had had no contact with social workers since leaving care, whilst all had had contact with a leaving care team run by NCH. Most felt that, whilst they sometimes needed help, they should have a say over this and should be able to ask for help if and when they need it, without this necessarily leading to child protection investigations. More worryingly, a significant number, both in this group and others, commented that, when they did ask for help, they often did not get it unless there were fears that their child was at risk.

For example, Jan argued that, *'social services and all that support, right, don't just stop there. They have to pass that line. You end up with more crap than what you started with.(...)There's helping, and there's hindering, d'you know'*. Jan's own experience, as she described it, was of having repeatedly asked social services for help, but having been told that she was not high priority. Her son was then taken into care. Jan stated that she was presented with a choice: either she placed her son in care voluntarily, or care proceedings would be initiated. If the latter option was taken, she was told, she would be less likely to get him back. Jan therefore felt that she was set up to fail. She described the case conference in the following terms:

Jan

1. I were just 17. And like, they were sat there, and, and it's harder
2. because I were in care. If I'd have been a 16-year old that had come
3. out of home, d'you know. //A: Yeah// I wouldn't have got half o't
4. hassles I had. Because I'd been in care, there were like, all these
5. peo:ple sat round this big table, like, police officers and that, sat
6. there, because like, I'd been in trouble when I were in kids homes,
7. I'd got, like, two police officers sat there reeling my, my criminal
8. record off, like, Dave's criminal record off, and like, saying 'This
9. isn't a suitable place', 'What's that got to do with it? In fact, I've not
10. been in trouble since I had Daniel. You know, what's your
11. problem?'

Other care leavers, whilst feeling that they were more likely than other young people to be monitored by social services, had different perspectives and feelings about this. For example, Jayshree stated that, whilst she would rather not have had social services involvement, she understood the need for it.

Jayshree

1. When you're younger you've got your, got your social workers, like,
2. for child protection for you or, for whatever's gone off in your past.
3. //A: Yeah// Um, like, they're looking over your shoulder, wondering if
4. you're doing alright and //A: Yeah// (p) because they know that there's
5. another lickle one involved, and before you were a lickle one and they
6. had to make sure you were alright. //A: Mm// So like, some young
7. mothers have got them making sure that they do a job, but them
8. mothers don't want them social workers being there. //A: Uh huh//
9. Because they want, like, the positive attitude, knowing that they are
10. doing alright and thinking, 'Well, I haven't got them there'. It's like,
11. they um (P) they know I've matured, and I'm not gonna go through
12. that. //A: Yeah// (...) They shouldn't judge. Whatever you've had like,
13. what you've been through yourself.

Jayshree's view of social workers as 'wondering if you're doing alright' is a much more benign one than that presented by Jan, Natasha or Robert. Perhaps it was more possible for Jayshree to hold this position as her parenting had not been the subject of child protection investigations. However, her son did have a

social worker, which Jayshree explained as being ‘because of his father’. She would have preferred this not to be the case, but understood and appreciated the concern to protect her son. In this extract, having described why social workers may need to be involved with the children of care leavers, Jayshree then switches to presenting the case from the point of view of ‘some young mothers’ (lines 6 onwards). Her comments further emphasise how care leavers experience professionals as expecting them to fail, and how having a social worker assigned to one’s child is, for some young people, equated with failure rather than support. Jayshree is also commenting appreciatively on the focus on the needs of the child. In lines 4-6 she describes how social workers have to be involved ‘because there’s a liddle one involved’. Interestingly, she then comments, ‘*before you were a liddle one* and they had to make sure you were alright’ (Italics added). Given the youth and vulnerability of many of the participants, it is interesting that they no longer seem to fit into a category in which social workers have to ‘make sure you were alright’. One interpretation of this is that, once a young woman becomes a mother, she may be evicted from the category of child and is, therefore, seen as no longer in need of support in her own right.

Nazia also described how her own experience of being taken into care had sensitised her to the fact that this happens to some children and young people.

Nazia

1. A D’you think being a mum’s changed you?
- 2.
3. N Well, even my social worker says, since I had my son, I matured
4. quick. //A: Mm// I think I’m more sensible now, since I’ve had
5. him. (p) I think I have to be, really.
- 6.
7. A Mmm. (p) Because of looking after him, do you mean?
8. [

9. N Yeah. Not only that but,
10. because I've been in care, I always had the thing about, because I got
11. took into care that my son was gonna get took off me. I know it's not
12. true, and my social worker told me it's not gonna happen either.
13. //A: Yeah// But, um, d'you know I was like, I always have to think
14. before I do something. //A: Yeah. Yeah// 'Cos even though I know
15. that's not gonna happen, I've still got it at the back of my mind,
16. because it happened to me.

Here, Nazia highlights a slightly different aspect of being a mother as a care leaver – that she fears her son will be taken into care ‘because it happened to me’.

Both of these accounts show young people being insightful and reflexive regarding their own circumstances. Jayshree is able to see that, just as she benefited from having professionals looking after her welfare when she was a child, the concerns of professionals over her son are motivated similarly. Nazia adds a further dimension, describing how having been in care herself, she has a strong awareness that this happens to children. This is particularly notable given that Nazia was very aware of the reasons why she was taken into care, and stated that she had liked being there. Those young people who are not clear about the circumstances surrounding being taken into care may be even more fearful of this happening to their own children.

CONCLUSION

Young people who have been in care frequently feel that they are positioned as in need of surveillance, either on grounds of criminality or of psychological disturbance, that is, as ‘trouble’ or ‘troubled’. Even where this is not the case, care leavers frequently report that others (particularly professionals) have low expectations of their ability to achieve in life, including in parenting. As there is

an over-representation of children and young people from minority ethnic groups in the care system, this surveillance has, in its consequences, a racist aspect. This is not to suggest that individual workers are racist, but that the structures of surveillance of the behaviour of care leavers can have consequences that impact disproportionately upon black young people.

Young women who become mothers around the time of leaving care are caught in a paradox. On the one hand, the state expects them to become adults, living independently, at a much earlier age than their peers. On the other hand, if they start families of their own, they are sometimes treated as likely to be either inadequate parents or a risk to their child. Neither of these situations is just, and neither allows care leavers to fulfil their potential.

Three key arguments emerge from these accounts. Firstly, young mothers currently receive insufficient support, yet can become the focus of intervention / surveillance should they show signs of having difficulty in coping. Secondly, young women require this support *in their own right*, as potentially vulnerable young people. Such support should be available to a young mother whether or not child protection concerns exist and should be provided separately from services in relation to the child. Thirdly, young women who have been in care may require on-going support at various points in their lives, again, in their own right and on the basis of individual need.

There is a tendency for statutory services to focus on child protection rather than on the support needs of young mothers who are care leavers. The current

emphasis on emergency child protection work rather than preventative social work, in a context of under-funding of social services forms the backdrop to this. Given the restrictions of budgets, it is understandable that child protection has to be prioritised, as it is of paramount importance. However, it is also about discursive practices around young mothers, and about child protection judgements being made by professionals within discourses of inadequacy that might not be made about other mothers. Furthermore, if young families are to be 'socially included', more services need to be developed which provide advice and support for young mothers in a non-judgmental manner. There is a clear need for more services for young care leavers who have children. At the same time, parents and children do not always have the same interests and needs, and it is important that such services are kept separate, as far as possible, from child protection work, so that young mothers will have sufficient trust in such services to access them. The best and most cost-effective form of child protection, in the long run, may well be supporting and protecting mothers.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the meanings young women give to their experience of early motherhood, and how these interact with hegemonic discourses and policies around teenage motherhood and youth. It is argued that the subjective meanings of early motherhood are significantly different from the meanings inherent in hegemonic discourses. Moreover, the discourses the young women use are sometimes contradictory, because they draw on both hegemonic discourses and on a counter-discourse which prioritises responsibility over age in accounting for good enough mothering.

While the young women give accounts of the difficulties and losses involved in becoming mothers, they also suggest that being a young mother is a more positive and, on the whole, more manageable experience than is allowed by hegemonic discourses. Much of their experience of motherhood is positive, even though mothering can be more difficult for those who have had limited experience of nurturing relationships or are living in isolated and difficult circumstances. It is particularly important to recognise these positive aspects and achievements because the young women often experience this as denied in social services practices and erased in hegemonic discourses.

KEY FINDINGS

Stories of pregnancy and the transition to motherhood

The central question running through this thesis has been, ‘what are the meanings the young women give to their experiences of motherhood?’ This includes their

accounts of pregnancy and the transition to motherhood. For most, pregnancy was unexpected and often a surprise or a shock. Their pregnancy accounts are characterised in many cases by crisis, or at least by the negotiation of a key 'narrative turning point' in their lives. Consequently, a process of adjustment marks initial stages of pregnancy. The young women's accounts lead to a questioning of any simple division between planned and unplanned pregnancy, and of an association between unplanned pregnancy and unwanted child. They also highlight how pregnancy, 'decision-making' and adjustment are rarely individual processes, but are profoundly social. All young women discussed the decision with someone, and the input of others, whether partners, friends, family or professionals is frequently a significant factor, whether in a negative or a positive sense. Pregnancy is also often a time of considerable housing instability, as well as a time of personal and lifestyle change.

This theme of personal or lifestyle change is even more evident in the early stages of motherhood. Some young women describe childbirth as a transformational event, during which they changed and 'grew up' through having to take responsibility for another life. Others tell narratives of moral redemption (McMahon 1995; Davies et al. 2001) in which they made major lifestyle changes such as giving up criminal activities or drug-taking. They argue that this was a response to novel circumstances - that drug-taking and crime are acceptable in particular conditions (those of 'being a teenager' with no responsibilities), but that motherhood is clearly incompatible with such activities and that change is therefore a necessity.

The meanings of motherhood

Their accounts reveal the young women negotiating a personal identity and a social role in times of personal and social change. The meanings of motherhood for the young women are heterogeneous, complex and contradictory, as they are for all women. Mothering and the discourses the young women employ in talking about it make subjective sense for the young women, and fit with their feelings, social worlds and lives. Motherhood and its attendant meanings are part of the young women's negotiation of their social and personal worlds in key dimensions, particularly those of gender and class. This is not to say that they consciously and deliberately choose motherhood as a means of doing so, but that pregnancy and motherhood become both an identity and a set of experiences through which material and personal circumstances can be given shape, channelled and understood.

Although it has many positive elements, motherhood is characterised by ambivalence for women in general (Urwin 1985; Hollway and Featherstone 1997) and is undeniably hard work. The young women clearly state these difficult aspects of mothering as well as the negative aspects of becoming a mother in one's teenage years. Like other mothers, they stress that motherhood is hard emotional and physical work and that it limits participation in leisure and social activities. Again, like other mothers, they find that the identity of mother subsumes that of young woman, so that they often experience themselves purely in terms of motherhood.

The young women see *early* motherhood as distinctive in key respects. First, it

makes it more difficult (though by no means impossible) for them to succeed in education, training and employment and thus to achieve the economic independence they desire. Secondly, it is particularly challenging to bring up children in poverty and in an unsettled housing situation. Paid work is denied to most young people by labour market conditions and motherhood can hardly make this situation much worse. Nevertheless, the young women have career ambitions that they find difficult to achieve, due to structural constraints combined with motherhood in the context of limited social support.

On the other hand, motherhood involves resourcefulness and resilience and for many, if not all, of the young women is a source of considerable pride and achievement. Motherhood allows them to be active in their lives and gives them agency and control. It also gives them a sense of responsibility and of adulthood, which would otherwise be denied them for some time to come.

Cultures of heterosexual femininity

Motherhood allows for the validation of heterosexual femininity as a source of identity. Some of this is spoken through discourses of traditional femininity, including adherence to traditional notions of the ideal of the nuclear family, and the taking on of the 'caring' role. Hegemonic discourses position young mothers as key members of a deviant 'underclass' who are rejecting and thus undermining the two-parent family, but the young women in fact display mainstream conventional values, aspirations and desires. They wish for the 'perfect fairy tale' of marriage leading to a family, home ownership and financial security. These conventional hopes and expectations are denied them partly by their structural

position and also by shifting gender relations. The cultural ideal of the family is not matched by the reality of their experience since the fathers of their children do not take on responsibility in the same way that they do. The young women expect equality in childcare and in domestic tasks, and when, as in the majority of cases, such expectations did not match with reality, they frequently view lone motherhood as preferable. A further aspect of heterosexual relationships to emerge is that of violence in a small but significant number of relationships. However, their positive portrayal of lone motherhood and their assessment of fathers as either unimportant or as those who 'do fathering' enables them, in many cases, to escape from and reject some of the worst features of patriarchal power, including inequity in parenting and violence.

Ethnicity, culture and material conditions

Although around a quarter of participants in individual interviews were from minority ethnic groups, there appears to have been no significant difference between the meanings of motherhood for these young women and white working-class participants. These remarks require some elucidation, because it is not, of course, possible to place all young women from minority ethnic groups in the same category. The young women describe themselves variously as Black African, Black Caribbean, British Asian, Pakistani and of mixed heritage. Their experiences and cultural identities differ, though they are likely to have a shared experience of racism. Nevertheless, the question of ethnic identity or even of racism rarely featured in young women's accounts.

This could be explained by the fact that I am a white woman and it is possible that

a black researcher might elicit different accounts. However, it is also the case that material deprivation, rather than 'culture' may be a more important factor in attempting to explain early motherhood amongst young women from minority ethnic groups. As we saw in Chapter One¹, Phoenix (1992) asserts that, if a young pregnant woman is black, the suggested reasons for her pregnancy tend to focus on 'cultural reasons' in ways that rarely feature in debates about young white women. She argues that to view young black women as becoming pregnant for different reasons from white young women is to miss the point, and that this argument excludes young black women from the category 'British' and that it conflates colour with culture. The findings here support those of Phoenix, that material conditions appear to be a more important factor than cultural difference. Whilst the young women display diversity in terms of ethnic identity and cultural heritage, they share a position of material deprivation and social marginalisation.

Growing up in a racially-structured capitalist patriarchy²

The central argument here is that motherhood enables young women to negotiate the structural impediments of their class position, the way this intersects with the categories of youth, gender and with a care history. Conditions for young people have deteriorated dramatically since the 1970s, so that only a small minority of those leaving education at 16 can expect to find paid employment and young people will find the provision of welfare far less generous than for over 25s. These economic factors do not impact upon all young people equally but have particularly severe effects upon young women who are working-class, black or have been in care. The meanings of early motherhood therefore need to be seen in

¹ See page 29.

² Griffin 1993b: 159.

the context of the youth labour market, the education system, and the impact of discrimination and of care/surveillance.

Motherhood is one way of becoming a young adult in adverse social circumstances, and it can be argued that motherhood constitutes a 'reproduction code' (Cohen 1997: 227) - that is, a cultural code that provides a young woman with a subject position and makes sense of discontinuities and contradictions, 'throwing a distinctive grid of periodisation and predicament over the life cycle' (op. cit.: 227). Discontinuity is a feature of all life stories (Linde 1993; Henriques et al. 1998), yet it often takes an extreme form in the lives of young women who have been in care. Motherhood is a powerful source of continuity both as subject position and social practice.

In situations of adversity (including being in care and living in particularly deprived working-class communities), people employ a range of strategies to negotiate such difficulties – that is, they have choices and room for manoeuvre, but within circumstances not of their own making. This is true of the young women in this study. As Ebele says, 'you've been given your cards, now play them'. That is, the young women are active agents constructing meaningful personal and social worlds in adverse and oppressive circumstances. Sometimes these choices take them forwards, and sometimes they may be counter-productive. Nevertheless, they need to be understood as responses to particular social, cultural and biographical circumstances.

Discursive strategies and their consequences

The young women's accounts show clear contrasts with the construction of young mothers in hegemonic discourses. Within mainstream academic discourses, teenage motherhood is often viewed as a major social problem. Authors of longitudinal studies often stress its location at the centre of a range of generationally transmitted problems, including educational under-attainment, poverty, child neglect and abuse. However, a 'risk assessment' approach³ tends to obscure the resilience of some young women. It also obscures the potential vulnerability of young mothers and of their specific support needs, in favour of an emphasis on pregnancy prevention and child protection.

Popular discourses are equally negative yet arguably more punitive than academic discourses, although their rationale is framed differently. In academic / scientific discourses teenage motherhood is problematised on technical and economic grounds. In popular discourses it is viewed as a moral issue. Women under twenty are excluded from the status of mother due to the mutual exclusiveness of discourses of motherhood and of adolescence. Moreover, young mothers have become the focus for social anxieties over changing family forms and shifting gender relations, leading to the demonisation of young mothers. The young women are well aware of dominant discourses of teenage mothers and describe being perceived by others as promiscuous ('slags'), economically dependent ('scroungers'), non-respectable ('rough' / 'dirt') and inadequate/abusive mothers. They are also caught in a no-win situation in which they face blame whatever course of action they take. Those who have abortions are positioned as immoral

³ See Chapter One.

and uncaring, whilst those who have children are seen as equally irresponsible.

In their own talk, the young women employ a range of discursive strategies which allow them to lay claim to the identity and status of 'mother' despite their disqualification from such an identity in hegemonic discourses. They also counter stigmatising hegemonic discourses through their own discourses. These take several forms, one of which involves drawing on hegemonic discourses of young mothers as irresponsible, whilst distancing themselves from others. Similarly, some mothers aged 17 or over distinguish themselves from 'really young mums' under 16. However, the young women also overtly counter hegemonic popular discourses, primarily through employing a counter-discourse of responsibility and of 'growing up' as a result of motherhood. Within this, they assert that there is no difference between them and older women in their ability to mother, although some qualify this by talking of a need for additional support for some. Nevertheless, they both resist and refute the notion that adolescence and motherhood are mutually incompatible and, instead, stress responsibility over age.

The discourses they use enable them to have a sense of agency and control, and also to resist highly negative and stigmatising subject positions. These discourses are not arbitrary, nor are they constructed purely in reaction or as a defence in the face of social condemnation. Instead, the discourses they employ make sense of their experience and fit with their life worlds. However, this has some negative consequences. For example, they adopt largely individualist discourses that allow them to resist hegemonic discourses and to shield themselves from negative categorisation. However, this can also mean that they often do not see their

circumstances as the outcome of structural conditions. As a result, their discourses could potentially result in self-blame and in a short-circuiting of real (that is, structural) change. But perhaps this is a battle for others to take on.

The young women frequently describe a contrast between their own interpretations of the significance of pregnancy and motherhood, and those of professionals with whom they come into contact. Where such a contrast is present, it sets up a dynamic that is counter-productive for the young women and their children, and for successful interventions if young women have difficulties in coping. The discursive positioning of young mothers as irresponsible and hence likely to be inadequate parents has particular implications for practices in relation to those who are care leavers. Whilst they may receive inadequate support as young women, if they become *mothers*, there is a tendency for them to be excluded from the category of 'vulnerable adolescent', and placed in the category of 'high risk mother'. This may propel them into the child protection arena. However, the young women's accounts provide a powerful case for a move to a more strengths-led model in relation to services for young people and for young mothers particularly.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

It is argued that policy should start from the young women's experience of themselves as resourceful and resilient and should address the fact that motherhood feels imaginatively right to them. It needs to acknowledge their own understandings, and work with them, rather than against them. It also needs to acknowledge and address the fact that they can be good enough mothers.

The current policy emphasis on the prevention of teenage pregnancy is important given the higher rate in Britain compared with neighbouring European countries. It is also supported by many of the young women's accounts. They were almost unanimous in remarking, 'I wish I'd waited', and many said that they would encourage young women to think long and hard before going ahead with motherhood. They suggested that young mothers such as themselves should go into schools and youth organisations to tell young women just how hard motherhood can be. Although they saw many gains from motherhood, they also stressed the sacrifices they had made and the difficulties involved.

However, whilst motherhood is inherently challenging, not *all* of the difficulties faced by the young women were intrinsic to motherhood. Some are due to the material conditions in which they are bringing up their children. These could be improved by a number of specific measures, including the re-instatement of equitable benefit levels for young people under 25 and more support services for young mothers. In order for this to happen, the dire financial situation of young people living away from their birth family, unemployed young people, young parents and care leavers needs to be both acknowledged and improved.

Whilst it is sometimes argued that improving the material conditions of young parents will act as an incentive to pregnancy, this argument cannot be sustained. No research to date has found evidence of the provision of social housing and extra money to be a motivation to teenage pregnancy, and this argument does not fit with young women's accounts of pregnancy as predominantly unplanned. Neither can it be argued that poverty is simply an outcome of teenage pregnancy.

Phoenix (1991) has shown that material disadvantage commonly pre-dates early motherhood, and research also shows that care leavers face huge obstacles to employment and prosperity (Biehal et al 1995; Stein and Wade 2000). Early motherhood cannot be blamed for the material disadvantage faced by care leavers. To do so is to avoid the underlying issue of social marginalisation of many working-class young people and particularly of care leavers. Maintaining the poverty of young mothers is also to punish their children.

The need of special financial provision for care leavers has been recognised in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. This Act makes financial support for care leavers available from social services, and not from social security funds. It is a positive move that the financial needs of care leavers have been recognised. However, it is a concern that the income level for care leavers has been set at the basic Income Support level. Care leavers are likely to have additional needs, which are not taken into account by this arrangement.

Services for care leavers also require considerable expansion. The Children (Leaving Care) Act will mean that all care leavers have a personal advisor, and that the support offered by this personal advisor will continue to the age of at least twenty-one. However, it is clear that the participants in this study who used projects run by NCH did not only use them to gain advice from an After Care worker. They also used them to meet other care leavers, to use facilities, to get a decent meal, and to have a local base to which they could return when they needed to. In a way, such projects provide the equivalent of a 'home base', which

other young people have from their birth family. This range of services, and the opportunity to meet others in similar circumstances was highly valued.

There is also a need for more specialist services that take account of the needs of both young mothers who have been in care and their children. As far as possible, this needs to be separated from child protection work, so that young mothers receive support in their own right. At the present time, services are frequently unable to cope with the complex needs of these young people. Vulnerable young women may need access to a range of resources at different points. At a practical level they require adequate accommodation, but they also need to be listened to, validated and believed. They may need advice and advocacy, and to meet others with experiences similar to their own.

There are several possibilities for schemes that could be developed to increase support for young mothers and their children, in addition to the currently piloted 'SureStart Plus' schemes, which may be able to serve this function. The main feature of these is that young women need to feel able to ask for help without fearing the instigation of child protection investigations⁴. Firstly, a system of 'community parents / grandparents' could be developed, along the lines of the Home Start scheme. Under such a scheme, a volunteer, also a mother, could be allocated to a care leaver, and could act as a source of advice and support in the way that parents and grandparents do for young women who have not been in care. Where foster carers still maintain contact with young people who they have

⁴ Of course, any services working with families has an ethical obligation to protect children. For example, the NCH project workers had a duty to report suspected abuse or neglect, and this was understood and appreciated by the young women. What they objected to, however, was the automatic equation of expressing difficulties with coping with fears for the safety of their child.

looked after, this arrangement could be formalised, and foster carers could then take on this 'community parent' role. Secondly, a twenty-four hour advice line could be set up, specifically for young mothers who lack family support. This suggestion was made by one of the participants, Justine, who felt that it would enable young people to access advice on their own terms and out of office hours. It would also enable them to ask for advice anonymously – a very important feature given the belief amongst care leavers that they will be viewed as inadequate mothers. Thirdly, a mentoring and advocacy scheme for young mothers who have been in care could be established staffed by mothers who have also been in care. Many young women in this study had considerable experience in childcare and some appeared to have a great deal to offer to others. This was particularly the case with those whose children were reaching school age.

Whilst there are a number of practical measures that can be suggested in terms of policy, this is not sufficient in itself. I want to argue that both debates over policy initiatives and young women's individual accounts need to be placed in a wider context of power relations: of structures of disadvantage and oppression, and of related discourses of gender, 'race', class and 'troubled youth'. It is no coincidence that moral panics over 'threatening youth' have become increasingly prevalent since the 1970s (Davies 1986; Scraton 1997). During this time, there has been a fundamental shift in the terms of the debate concerning welfare provision. Working-class young people have become targeted for increasing social control as an integral part of this crisis. Moral panics around 'teenage mums' of the kind that have been described in this thesis legitimate further surveillance, and allow for an increasingly punitive climate in relation to vulnerable young people. Dominant

discourses of young mothers as feckless and promiscuous galvanise widespread fears over women's sexuality and the changing nature of childhood. This allows the state, the media and the wider public to ignore, scapegoat or punish vulnerable young women at a time of uncertainty and social change. Young women can thus be seen as casualties of a crisis around the family, childhood and welfare.

This is not to claim that all young women can cope with motherhood with equanimity. Motherhood, particularly lone motherhood, can be a struggle, and this may be compounded for those who have been in care. There are many possible reasons for this, but it is not helped where there is a lack of financial, practical and emotional support available to them. Given the trauma and disruption which many have already had to negotiate, it is perhaps unsurprising that some of them were having, or had had coping difficulties.

Nevertheless, a key message to emerge from the young people's accounts relates to negative expectations of them as individuals, due both to their relative youth and to their past experiences. The young women recognised that some people are unable to provide adequate care for their children, and that child protection is vital. However, they objected to the automatic equation of being young and having been in care with being a risk as a parent.

Young mothers currently receive insufficient support, but then become the focus of intervention / surveillance should they show signs of having difficulty coping. Young women require support in their own right, as potentially vulnerable young people. Such support should be available to a young mother whether or not child

protection concerns exist, and should be provided separately from services in relation to the child. Also, young women who have been in care may require on-going support at various points in their lives, on the basis of individual need.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE

The main claim to originality of this thesis lies in its use of original empirical research. In addition, it adds to the literature on young women and motherhood in distinctive ways. There is little research on the lives and experiences of girls and young women, limited research on women's accounts of the transition to motherhood and the meanings of motherhood and mothering. There is an even smaller body of literature on *young* women's accounts of motherhood and the research literature on early motherhood amongst care leavers is almost non-existent. This study therefore contributes to these areas of academic knowledge and also seeks to both theorise on the basis of young women's accounts and draw out implications for policy and practice.

Studies that have explored women's narratives of becoming mothers in depth have been predominantly based on accounts from white, middle class women (though McMahon 1995 is a notable exception). There are very few studies of women's 'insider' accounts of becoming mothers, and only one previous study of young mothers' narratives of the transition to motherhood (Kirkman et al 2001). This study adds to the small literature that considers how the experience of motherhood and its associated meanings differ for women who are excluded from the category of 'good mother'. In particular, as we have seen, the position of the young women on the margins of 'good enough' motherhood, means that their accounts are

constructed in ways that attempt to resist their positioning on the margins.

Whilst there are few accounts of the life worlds of young mothers, studies of experiences of motherhood amongst young women who have been in care are even more scarce. Only Corlyon and McGuire (1999) have examined the experiences of this group as the central focus of research. However, Corlyon and McGuire's study focuses more on the sexual health and sex education of young women in care, rather than the experiences of young mothers. This study adds to previous research in providing an in-depth study of young mothers who have been in care, whilst adopting an explicitly feminist and youth-centred approach. It is, to my knowledge, the only study of this topic to date that has explored the implications of discourses around young people who have been in care for welfare practices. The argument of Chapter Eight around the surveillance of mothers who have been in care through child protection procedures have not been previously explored in detail.

A critical approach to the topic enables it to be considered in the light of wider social, economic, cultural and psychological processes. This allows the research to deconstruct dominant representations and practices in relation to young mothers and care leavers. In addition, it allows it to take account of the ways in which accounts are produced in interviews, as well as acknowledging the ways in which such accounts are constrained by material existence. It also enables it to be considered in relation to wider knowledge and theorisation of motherhood and of youth. As we have seen, the young women's accounts need to be situated within relations of gender, class and 'race', and the way in which they position

themselves, and are positioned by social relations and discursive practices, have implications for subjectivity and for surveillance or welfare.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are several areas for development in future research. These emerge from the above findings, the limited amount of previous research in this area and the limitations of this study. First, there is a clear need for more studies on the lived experience of young women, and particularly of working-class young women. More specifically, there is a need for further research on the subjective accounts of women who become mothers before the age of twenty-one, of a kind that explores their stories as legitimate in their own right, rather than as primarily contributions to a teenage pregnancy prevention strategy.

Secondly, time constraints mean that this study was based on a series of interviews, conducted in one year. It would be useful to supplement this study with further ethnographic work over a longer time period, in order to explore further the relationship between young women's accounts and their life worlds. It would also be useful to conduct an interview study over a longer time period, or to carry out a follow-up interview study with the same young women several years on. This would allow an exploration of whether their accounts are different when they are retrospective, and also to examine change in their lives and those of their children over time. Alternatively, it would be both interesting and useful to conduct an interview study with older women who had been young mothers some years before. Taken together, these suggestions point to the need for considerable research in this area from a feminist and youth-centred perspective.

Finally, the need for further research into violence in relationships is suggested. In this study, a small but significant number of young women discussed having experienced violence in relationships, and these young women viewed lone motherhood as preferable to such violence. This suggests a need for further study of the extent and significance of such violence in relationships and of its relationship to subsequent lone motherhood.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis has attempted to highlight the relationship between social circumstances, experiences and feelings in young women's accounts of becoming mothers. The young women in this study were asking for understanding, respect, optimism, and support to help them to both achieve their own aims and to be good enough parents. They have mainstream values and aspirations: wanting to marry, have a career and a house of their own. Their stories suggest that, given the opportunities, including financial and practical support, they can achieve both as parents and in their own right. As Karen commented, 'why should I be unsuccessful and a bum, just because I've had a baby young?' This specific comment is an example of a wider argument: that young people in adverse circumstances should be considered according to individual need and encouraged to fulfil their potential as parents and in their own right. As Ebele remarked, 'there are many roads to Rome'. It is hoped that this study makes a contribution towards recognition of the many different routes that young women in adverse circumstances may take towards adulthood, and towards a consideration of the actions of young women in their socio-cultural context.

Are you a young mother?

If you want to ask more questions before you decide whether to take part, you can contact the interviewer direct at the address or phone number given here:

Interviewer

Alison Rolfe,
Department of Social Policy and Social Work,
University of Warwick,
Coventry,
CV4 7AL.
Tel: 01203 523547.

Sponsor

The research is paid for by NCH Action For Children, and by the Economic and Social Research Council (a national organisation run by the Government which gives money for research).

Thank you for reading this leaflet. If you decide to take part, we hope that you will enjoy the interview.

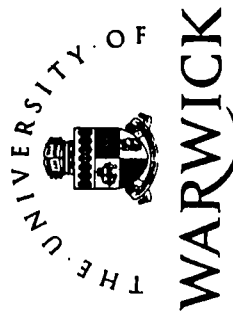
Useful contacts

Women's Aid: 0117 963 3542.
NSPCC: 0800 800 500.
Childline: 0800 1111.
First Key (for care leavers): 0113 244 3898.

March 1999.

NCH Action For Children is one of Britain's leading child care charities.
Registered Office: 85 Highbury Park, London N5 1UD
Registered Charity No. 215301 founded in 1869

Interested in taking part in research?



NCH Action For Children would like to know more about the day-to-day experiences of young mothers. We are looking for young women aged between 14 and 21, who have had a baby. We are asking them to join in a group interview with other young mothers.

The group interview will give you an opportunity to talk about your life, your experience of being pregnant, and of being a young mother. You will get a chance to talk about whether more should be done for young mothers.

The interviewer will ask the group some general questions, but you will have the chance to talk about whatever you feel is important.

The sorts of questions the group will discuss are:

- * What are the ups and downs of being a young mother?
- * What do you need to help you as young mothers?

Everything you say will be treated with respect. It will be up to you what you say, and you won't have to talk about anything you don't want to. If you would prefer to be interviewed on your own then that is fine.

We can arrange and pay for childminding while the interview is happening. Refreshments will be also be available during the interview, and you will receive £10 in appreciation for your time and trouble.

The interviews are taking place in several NCH Action For Children projects in England and Wales. Information from the interviews will be collected together to get opinions from young mothers from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. (We are particularly interested in young mothers who have been 'in care').

After all the information has been collected, reports will be written for NCH Action For Children publications, and for publications aimed at young people. We hope the reports will help to spread more positive views about young mothers. We also hope that the reports will help adults who work with young mothers, and who do research with them, to learn more about young women's views. The information will also help NCH Action For Children to make sure that the services they are providing are as helpful as possible.

If you do decide to take part in a group interview, you will also be given the opportunity to be involved further in the research, for example, by being interviewed on your own. If you want, you can also be involved later, through giving your views on what you think about the research, and on what the researchers say in reports. We will send you a short report at the end of the project.

'Young Mothers' research project: a research agreement.

Please read the notes below, which are to tell you what to expect, and what your rights are when you agree to take part in an interview.

If there is anything that isn't clear, or anything else you want to know before you agree to take part, please ask.

Taking Part in the interview

- You will be given any information you wish to have about the research. For example, you may want to know about why it is being carried out, how it will be carried out, and what the reasons are for doing it.
- Interviews will be recorded, either on tape or in note form. The method of recording will be agreed with you before the interview starts.
- You need only answer questions which you want to answer.
- You can leave the interview at any point.
- Agreeing to take part in one part of the research doesn't mean you are agreeing to doing anything else for the research.

Confidentiality

- In general, everything you say to me will be treated as confidential. This means I will not tell anyone else what you say, and that anything you tell me will only be used for the research. For example, things you say may be quoted in a written report (although without identifying you), or your views may be compared to those of other young mothers.
- BUT there may be situations in which I feel that I cannot keep what you say to myself. This will only happen if I am really concerned that people involved are being hurt or are unsafe.
- If this happens and I feel that I must take appropriate action, I will try to discuss this with you first.

Please turn over.

How the tapes and written reports will be stored

- You will be able to see a written copy of the interview tape. At this stage, you will be able to withdraw any comments you made which you are not happy with, and you will be able to have them taken out of the written copy of your interview.
- All names and addresses will be removed from the written copy so that you can't be identified.
- Your name and address will be kept separately from tapes and from the written copy of your interview.
- Tapes will be wiped clean when the research is finished, so that no-one else can listen to them.

The research agreement

If you have understood the notes above, and agree to take part in the interview, please sign your name, and write your age, below.

Name:

Age:

My contact details

You can write to me at:

Ali n Rolfe,
Department of Social Policy and Social Work,
University of Warwick,
Coventry,
CV4 7AL

Or you can phone me on: 01203 523547 or 01203 523164.

Questionnaire: The experience of being a young mother

It would be really useful to me if you could fill in this brief form about yourself. No one outside of the research project will see this information.

Name

Age

How many children do you have?

How old is your child (or children)

If you are pregnant at the moment, when do you expect your baby?

.....

Which of the following best describes you? (Please tick)

White

Black - Caribbean

Black - African

Black - Other

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Mixed Heritage

None of these

If you answered 'mixed heritage' or 'none of these' please give details

.....

Have you ever been 'in care'? Yes / No

If so, how old were you when you first went into care?

And how old were you when you most recently left care?

Please turn over.

Is there anything else you want to say, about the interview or about your experiences?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you very much for taking part in the interview, and for filling in this form.

Would you be prepared to be contacted again, to be interviewed on your own about your experiences?

Yes / No

(Please circle one of these).

If you have answered yes, please fill in the section below, giving a phone number or address where I can get in touch with you.

Address

.....

.....

Phone number

Group interview guide

Introductions

Introduce myself

Explain about research – what and why

Explain research interview – structure, time and content

What happens to the interview material afterwards

Go through research agreement

Agreement to tape recording?

Begin taping

Name round and brief introductions from group members

1) The project

How long have they been involved?

What sorts of things do they do?

2) ‘Who are you’?

If you were asked to describe yourself to a stranger, what three things might you say about yourself?

3) Concepts of parenthood

What does the phrase, ‘being a mother’ mean to you?

What does the phrase ‘being a father’ mean to you?

4) How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

‘Young parents should be given more help’

‘Professionals shouldn’t interfere in the lives of young parents’

‘It’s best to have your children when you’re young’

‘Being young should be a time of fun and pleasure’

‘One parent can bring up a child as well as two’

‘Life is harder for teenage girls than it is for teenage boys’

‘It’s important for young people to become independent by having a good job’

5) Support and stress

Do you feel you have much stress in your life? If so, what kinds of things cause you the most stress?

Which people provide you with the most support, practical and emotional?

6) Past, present and future

If you had the power to turn back the clock and change something about your life, what would it be?

What one thing would be really helpful to you now?

What are your hopes for the future?

7) Filling in gaps

Check list of themes

- Meanings of early motherhood
- Pregnancy, the transition to motherhood
- Gender relations, fatherhood
- Experiences of professionals – relationship between this and having been in care
- Experiences of leaving care / leaving home
- Sexuality and sexual relationships
- Social support
- Stress
- Finances
- Aspirations, achievements, ambitions, regrets

Is there anything we haven't covered so far that you would like to mention or discuss?

8) The research

Is there anything particular you would like to see in the research?

Is there anything that you would like to see coming out of the research?

Disengaging

Summarise themes, reflecting back

Stop recording

Thanks for participation

Completion of questionnaires

Contact and follow up information

Individual interview guide

INTRODUCTIONS

Introduce myself

Explain about research – what and why

Explain research interview – structure, time and content

What happens to the interview material afterwards

Go through research agreement

Agreement to tape recording?

Begin taping

1) PRESENT EXPERIENCE

Name and age of child / children

Age of participants

Age at pregnancy and at childbirth

Current living circumstances:

Accommodation: type and area

Who she lives with

Occupation – Full-time mother, work or college?

Can you describe to me what a typical day is like for you at the moment?

How do you feel in general about your present circumstances?

2) THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD

General trigger question:

‘If it’s okay with you, I’d like to spend some time hearing about the sorts of things that have happened in your life, since around the time when you first became pregnant. I’d like to hear your story really, in as much detail as you want to tell me. Like, where you were living and what sorts of things you were doing around the time when you became pregnant, what it was like for you being pregnant, how others responded to your pregnancy, what giving birth was like for you, and how it’s been for you being a mum. Perhaps we can start around the time when you got pregnant, or when you left care / home, and you could talk me through it?’

CHECKLIST

(questions to be asked around these areas if not covered as a result of loosely structured discussion triggered by above question).

Pregnancy

Circumstances at time of pregnancy (Working / school / unemployed? Living at home / in care?
Participants's reaction to pregnancy
Reaction of baby's father
Reactions of other people
Support?
Did things change during pregnancy?

Childbirth and immediately after:

What was childbirth like for you?
What was it like when first a mum?
What were the first few weeks like?
How did other people react?
Feelings and knowledge around caring for baby.

Leaving care / leaving home

Age at leaving care / home
Circumstances at the time – Pregnant? A mother?
Reasons for move
Where did you move to? Was it okay?
Did you feel ready and prepared to move when you did?
Support?
Any subsequent moves?

Support

Family
Friends
Professionals
Social work support

Finances

Relationship with baby's father / views on fathers

3) GENERAL QUESTIONS

Views on being a young mother

Have you changed since you became a mother? If so, in what ways?
Do you think it's any different being a mum when you're young, or is it the same at any age?
(Care leavers only) Do you think it's any different being a young mum when you've been in care, or does it make no difference?

Past and future

Overall, are you satisfied with the way things have turned out for you and your child(ren) at the moment?

Of your had your time again, would you do anything differently? Would you want anyone else to do things differently?

Do you have plans for the future? If so, what are they?

Filling in gaps

Is there anything else you wanted to mention?

Is there anything particular you think should be done differently for young mothers / care leavers?

DISENGAGING

Summarise themes, reflecting back

Stop recording

Thanks for participation

Completion of questionnaires

Contact and follow up information

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